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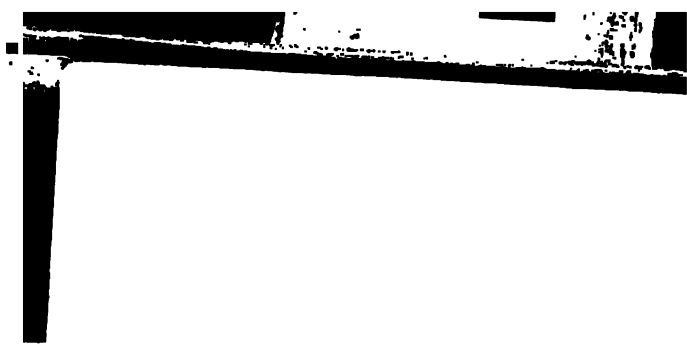
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ON HIS TOES!







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He made one flying leap from the edge of the platform
Page 302

ON HIS TOES!

BY
IRVING THOMAS McDONALD

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
FRANK J. RIGNEY



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ON HIS TOES

CHAPTER ONE

DAN GETS A SHOCK

DAN DIXON crouched excitedly behind the low-built stone wall that separated the dusty country road along which he had been traveling from the flat pasture lands beyond, and glued his eye to a chink between the stones.

Racing furiously across the broad field straight in his direction came a hardy-looking little band whose garb proclaimed them pioneers of the early west, while close behind, lashing their wiry ponies to a frenzied speed, chased a score of half-naked savages.

Suddenly wheeling his foam-flecked chestnut, the leader of the white men—a tall, square-shouldered individual with flowing black beard—halted his hard-pressed company. Quickly ordering the women to the rear, he dismounted and, advancing a few steps toward the pursuers, held up his hand as though signalling for a parley. But the gesture was ignored. On they came, puffs of smoke punctuating their course as they rapidly closed the distance that separated them from their prey.

Such was the scene that met Dan Dixon's eye,

and it is little wonder that he stared in undiluted amazement. Under the circumstances of time and place which the action of the scene would seem to indicate the sight would have been startling enough. But this was not Colorado in the days of '49. It was New Jersey in 1920!

Convinced at last that his eyes were not tricking him, he threw a quick glance over his shoulder along the road he had just travelled and debated excitedly with himself whether to go for help and risk a bullet from a redskin rifle, or await developments in the situation which might possibly afford him an opportunity of lending a helping hand himself. For he did not pause now to wonder at the presence of savages and hard-riding pioneers in this peaceful Jersey meadow. He had seen them—time enough for explanations when the white men were saved!

Again he bent to the peep-hole and— What was this? Both bands, Indians and Whites, although riding as fast as ever in his direction, were farther away from him than the last time he had looked! And— Yes, sir! There was that big man with the black whiskers dismounting again and advancing towards the enemy with hand upraised in that self-same gesture!

But now something else happened that quite took the boy's mind off this mystery. One of the Indians, a stalwart brave with a single black feather sticking up through his long, coarse hair, had separated himself from his companions and, dismounting, circled

out in a stealthy manner until he was now sneaking up on the Whites from behind—towards the place where the women, their backs to him, huddled fearfully together, ignorant of this new angle from which danger approached.

Danny could stand it no longer. He straightened up like a flash and was over the wall in a bound, leaping towards the sneaking redskin. With a wild yell he hurled himself through the air square on the other's back and they went down in a squirming mass of arms and legs!

"Hey! You big boob, get off my back! What's the idea?"

But Dan only pummelled him the harder.

"Drop that knife, you sneaking scoundrel!"

Could it be? Yes—it actually was! The Indian laughed and tossed away the murderous-looking weapon!

"Have it your own way," he remarked calmly. "Now will you get up off me?"

But Dan was too surprised to move. He had expected a fierce battle—to the death, perhaps!—with this untamed savage. And instead, here was the "untamed savage" calmly taking orders from him—and speaking very good English in the bargain.

"Say, Ralph, will you take this Rube off my back? He'll have half my make-up off if you don't."

Dan looked straight up into the face of another "Indian" who was standing peaceably by the side of the black-bearded pioneer, with whom he seemed to be on the best of terms.

"Come on, young fellow," he smiled comically through his war paint, "get up and get out of the lot. You'd have spoiled that scene if they were taking it. Lucky for you it was only a rehearsal."

Danny rose slowly to his feet and scratched his head wonderingly.

"Rehearsal? But I saw—"

The loud ringing of a bell interrupted him and drew his attention towards the other end of the field in which direction the others were now making their way more or less leisurely.

A number of automobiles, both touring-cars and trucks, were parked in the shade of the leafy maples that fringed the meadow, and from where Dan stood he could make out white clothes being laid on the ground. It looked for all the world like a big picnic party.

But the object that next attracted his attention confirmed the suspicions that the last few seconds had aroused in his mind. It was a black, rectangular box-like instrument resting on a tall tripod. And Danny blushed in embarrassment at the fool he had just made of himself. He could see it all now. This was a motion-picture company, and he must have interrupted the rehearsal of one of their scenes!

"What a ninny I must be!" he said aloud.

"Oh, I don't know," remarked a youthful voice beside him. "Lots of folks make mistakes like that."

Dan turned and faced the speaker, a boy of about

his own age and height, but lighter by twenty pounds. A wisp of tawny yellow hair straggled out from under his well-soiled straw hat and a plentiful supply of freckles ornamented his face, neck, and arms which seemed abnormally long and skinny against the black of his sleeveless jersey. Faded khaki pants and a pair of rusty, low tan shoes completed his costume. A big willow basket which he carried was partially filled with objects of various descriptions, mostly bits of wearing apparel which had evidently been dropped by the actors during the rehearsal, and which he was in the act of collecting when he had overheard Danny's remark of self-abasement.

"You didn't do any harm, anyway," he continued. "They were only rehearsing the action. But if they had been shooting the scene— Oh my! What Mac wouldn't do to you!"

He grinned with apparent enjoyment of the possibilities suggested by the thought.

"Shooting the scene? I don't understand."

"That means taking the picture after Mac says it's been rehearsed enough, you know," explained the other as he picked up an Indian headdress and tossed it into the basket.

"Oh, I see." Danny walked slowly along with him, stooping from time to time as he observed the nature of his companion's duties, and helping him fill his basket. "And who is Mac?"

"MacQuarrie—Douglas O. MacQuarrie, you know."

"What does he do?" asked Dan.

His companion looked at him curiously for a moment before he spoke as if he doubted the earnestness of the question.

"Do you mean to say that you never heard of Douglas O. MacQuarrie, the greatest motion-picture director in the business?"

"I don't even know what a motion-picture director is," Dan confessed.

"Whew!" whistled the boy with the basket. "You *are* green, aren't you? Well, then, a director is the man who—why the man who directs the picture. He tells the actors and actresses what to do and how to do it and—and—oh, *everything*. Why, he *makes* the picture. Now do you see?"

They were approaching the fringe of trees under which, protected from the hot rays of the noonday sun by the abundant foliage above, the company rested, some seated on camp chairs, but the majority lounging about in various positions of ease on the soft grass, while they munched sandwiches and drank coffee.

Dan's companion, whose name he soon learned was Eddie Jordan, and whose official capacity was that of assistant property-man, having to look after the various items of accoutrements, furniture, etc., halted at one of the biggest trucks upon which was tacked a large card bearing the word "PROPS" in black letters and deposited his basket on the tail-board. Then, stopping at a covered truck, he procured a plate of sandwiches and two tin cups of

coffee and made his way back to the tree under which he had left his newly formed acquaintance.

"I brought along some extra sandwiches and coffee so you could have some. I hate to eat alone. And the rest of these folks don't cotton much to me. I'm only assistant props, you know, so I suppose I'm beneath their notice." This was said good-naturedly and without the slightest trace of ill-feeling.

So the two youths made themselves comfortable on the grass and proceeded to get better acquainted while they discussed their lunch.

The quiet old meadow had been completely transformed by the presence of these players until it resembled a detached portion of a circus lot. Peacefully grazing in a rope corral were some forty or fifty horses, saddled and bridled just as they had been driven in from their morning's work of mad racing across the meadows. Flanking the corral were the automobiles, of which three were expensive touring-cars belonging presumably to the director and one or two of the higher-salaried actors. Beside these were parked several large express trucks with thwart-ships planks for seats for the accommodation of the "extra people" as they were called who just played small parts, such as the Indians, pioneers, etc. The "grub-truck" and "prop-truck" completed the caravan.

There were all told between sixty and seventy-five people in the present company. Of these the greater

number were extras and attired in the costumes of either plainsmen and women or Indians. The others included the camera-man, who did the actual photography; the assistant camera-man; the property-man and his assistant, whose acquaintance we have already made; two or three general-utility boys, whose business it was to do what they were told—(and that might be anything, the good Lord knows!)—and last but most important, Douglas MacQuarrie, the director, the man upon whose shoulders rested the whole responsibility of the production under way, and whose word, of necessity, was absolute law in studio and on location. As the captain is to his ship and crew so is the director to his studio and company. And for much the same reason.

“There’s Mac—over there.”

Eddie pointed toward a tree under which Dixon saw a slender, energetic looking man in the early thirties dressed comfortably in a white soft-collared shirt, khaki riding-pants, cloth cap, and tan leather puttees. Although reclining easily in a somewhat elaborately contrived camp chair there was nothing of relaxation in his appearance. He was intent upon a sheaf of manuscript sheets which he held in his left hand and upon which he made frequent notations with a gold pencil held in his right.

“He’s the only man in the outfit that never rests. From morning to night he’s always doing something. And he never lets up until it’s done right. Ho—hum!” Eddie yawned widely and wearily.

"Pretty near time for the call. See you in a few minutes."

He sauntered casually down the row of trees towards the grub-truck with the empty cups and plates in his hand.

Danny's legs were tired and he was thoroughly enjoying the comfort of the soft grass. But if his body was idle his brain was not. He pondered thoughtfully over Eddie's last words which he had spoken about MacQuarrie. "Always doing something." At first this sentiment did not impress Dan as being much worthwhile. He knew a number of people who always made a great show of being busy. But as he himself expressed it, they never seemed to get anywhere. They flitted like butterflies from flower to flower and always travelled in circles. But MacQuarrie, according to the assistant property-man, "never lets up until it's done right." And that, thought Dixon, was something worth thinking about. He recalled that Eddie had spoken of him as "the greatest motion-picture director in the business." And now the thought occurred to him that his new acquaintance had unwittingly described the attributes that must have been responsible for his success.

The harsh clang of a gong aroused Dixon from his brown study. He looked up to find the peaceful scene changed to one of bustling, businesslike activity. A number of extra people were making for the prop-truck to salvage bits of their accoutrements that had been lost in the morning's work.

Already the grub-truck was chugging its way out of the field for the road, its usefulness at an end for the day.

A half-dozen of the principals—actors and actresses who had important rôles in the play being produced—were grouped around MacQuarrie, who, still holding the scenario script in his hand, was giving them the final directions for their parts in the scene that was about to be filmed.

The camera-man had moved his apparatus over to the edge of the group so that he could hear the instructions as he prepared his camera for its work. For it is quite essential to perfect cinematography that the photographer have an intelligent idea of the action he is to "shoot."

Young Dixon, keenly interested in the whole prospect, was drawn as by a magnet to the centre from which all activity seemed to radiate—MacQuarrie. As unobtrusively as possible he threaded his way through the groups of mingled "Indians" and "pioneers" until the director's low-pitched but far-carrying voice reached him.

"And as for you, Barton," he was saying, "I've told you a dozen times to forget that beard you're wearing. You're as conscious of it as though it was a boil on your chin. Every time you make a gesture you avoid it as carefully as you would a dagger. Don't be afraid of it. You won't knock it off. And if you do there's plenty of spirit gum in the truck to stick it on with. Just forget that you've got it. You would if it was natural. I know you've always

worked smooth-face, but you've been in the business long enough now to know how to handle crêpe hair.

"Miss Jocelyn, you're working your eyes overtime. Those agonized expressions don't register when you're thirty or forty feet from the camera. Save that stuff for the close ups. You'll have a couple of them later on.

"Summers, your work is better today. You're beginning to feel your part. Now we're going to run through this scene once more while Meadows is fixing up the extras and then we'll shoot it. Questions, anybody?"

He darted a quick searching glance into the eye of each of his principals and, satisfying himself that he was thoroughly understood in every detail, turned to the camera-man.

"Ready, Charlie?"

"All set!"

"Positions!"

Danny felt, of a sudden, that he was out of place. And although something new and wonderful—something that he couldn't explain—had been stirring within him since he had been listening to Mac-Quarrie; and although he wanted to stay near him and watch him work more than he had ever wanted anything else, yet a sense of propriety warned him that he would soon become decidedly unpopular if he kept getting in people's way. So he backed off reluctantly.

"Gee, where've you been hiding? I couldn't find you, so I thought you'd gone."

He turned to find Eddie Jordan puffing and perspiring under an armful of old muzzle-loaders, the weight of which was bending him backward.

"I've been taking in the sights. Want me to help you with those guns?"

"Gosh, I'd be glad to have you if you feel that way."

"Well," he answered a bit eagerly, "that's just how I feel. What will I do with them?"

"Just pass them around to the extras—the men, you know. Not the Indians—they've got theirs. Just the white men."

Dan, for some reason which he didn't stop to explain, felt just the least bit of elation at being of use as he took the guns in his strong young arms and started distributing them among the actors.

When he had delivered the last weapon he was within a few feet of the property-truck, and, pausing a moment, he looked around for Eddie.

"Come on, you! Shake a leg! We haven't got all day to fit these people out, you know."

He turned at the sound of the voice. A big, goodnatured-looking fellow with a sunburned face was standing facing him from the tailboard of the truck.

"Are you speaking to me?" he asked politely.

The big fellow looked at him disdainfully.

"No!" he answered with what was evidently intended for withering scorn. "I'm talking to the Sultan of Zulu! But if I'm not talking to you you'd better not try to talk to me when payday comes

'round. Grab these headdresses now, and get busy with the Indians. Speed up!"

In the wink of an eye Dan grasped the situation. The head property-man had seen him helping Eddie Jordan and had taken it for granted that he was one of the utility men of whom Eddie had told him. And he was putting him to work. He almost fell over himself in his eagerness to get the headdresses.

"And come back for more when you get rid of those. Don't stall around the lot like you were just now."

"I won't!" promised Dan with alacrity.

For the next half-hour he hustled with might and main. At the end of that time there was nothing else to be done until the director would have finished the scenes through which he was putting the principals, so Dixon hunted up Eddie Jordan and told him of his experience.

"Is he the one who usually hires the help?" he asked eagerly.

"Who, Hank Meadows? Sure—that is, the utilities and assistant props., and that-like."

"But what would he do if he found out that he never hired me?"

Eddie grinned wisely.

"Don't let that worry you none, old boy. If you always work the way you've been hustling for the last half-hour you wouldn't have any trouble at all in convincing Hank Meadows that you belong on the payroll. Just you show up at the studio to-

morrow morning at nine o'clock if you want a job. You'll go right to work, all right."

But Dan Dixon did not show up at the studio the next morning at nine o'clock.

He showed up at eight.



CHAPTER TWO

A PROBLEM SOLVED

HAD you told Dan Dixon, upon the morning during which happened the events recorded in the preceding pages that before nightfall he would be connected in any way with a motion-picture company, he would have laughed heartily at what he would have considered an absurd prospect. And had you added that his position would be the most humble imaginable, that he would be a kind of goat for every one who was too lazy to do things for themselves, he would probably have referred, with just the least trace of superiority, to his recent graduation from Holbrooke Military Academy, and would have asked if you thought he was going to throw away his education on a job like that.

Dan had lived, as long as he could remember, with a bachelor uncle in a small New Jersey town. His uncle, a carpenter by trade, was a great lover of books and through his wide reading had conceived a mighty ambition that his nephew should not be as he was, but should have enough of education to enable him to attain the higher levels of achievement.

And so it was that he had supplied the means wherewith Danny had taken his course at Holbrooke.

“And remember, lad,” he had told him, “don’t think that education is confined to books, for only a small percentage of human knowledge is bound between covers. Use your eyes and your ears always but be sparing in the use of your tongue. And when you do use it, use it first to find out the things that your eyes and ears don’t understand. The less you talk, you know, the fewer mistakes you’ll have to correct.”

Dan was keen enough even in those days of his boyhood to appreciate his uncle’s wisdom and to realize that its foundation was laid in practical experience. So he had learned to use his faculties of observation and to see to it that when he spoke he knew what he was talking about.

He had stood well in his studies for the most part and had made his mark in athletics. He partook of all the school activities and, although he was never known to go out of his way to avoid a fight, yet he never sought one. When his fights were over they were forgotten. He bore no malice and thought more of good-feeling and honour between fellows than he did of victory. He was never ashamed to admit defeat and to acknowledge the superiority of his opponent’s fistical ability—on those few occasions when he had reason to. In fact, in Dan’s theory of companionship that was the sole object of a fight, to remove some obstacle that had arisen to prevent a feeling of good-fellowship between friends. And a fight, in his estimation, was never over until a sincere reconciliation had been effected.

One instance stands out as a striking example of this trait in Dan's character. It was during his second year at Holbrooke when, in the fourteenth inning of the game that was to decide the season's championship in the league of which the academy was a member, an altercation arose between Dan, who was playing short for Holbrooke and Herb Rice, the captain of Winchester, the opposing team.

Rice had doubled to deep centre and stolen third on a wild pitch. As he dashed past Dan on the steal his spike caught on a pebble and nearly threw him. When he reached third base Rice called time and complained to the umpire that Dixon had tried to trip him. And although Dan pointed out the scars on the base-line and the scratches which Rice's spike had made on the pebble and satisfied every one else that he had had nothing to do with the near accident, Rice continued to glare at him angrily. Danny only smiled good-naturedly, believing that the other's interest in the game was so tense as to blind him to the usages of fair play.

The next man up knocked a pop-fly just back of third base. As Hart, the third baseman, ran back to field it Rice played far off third, ready for a quick dash home with the winning run if Hart dropped the ball. But when he saw Dixon on the lope to cover third he turned and ran quickly back. Dan, with his eyes on Hart, was not as careful as he should have been and was partially, at least, to blame for the collision that followed. But he realized it and was quick to offer an apology.

"I'm sorry, old man. It was all my fault. Let me help you."

He reached out his hand to help the other to his feet but it was struck away angrily.

"Get out of the way! I'll get you after the game."

Dan said nothing more, but as Hart had caught the fly and was back at his position, he resumed his place at third.

In Holbrooke's half of the same inning with two out, Dan tripled to left centre. The racket of cheers, yells, and fishhorns from the Holbrooke bleachers must have rattled Rice, who was reputed to be the steadiest of the Winchester twirlers. He called his catcher, Grady, up two-thirds of the way to the pitcher's box for a conference. Grady, thinking that Rice as captain, must know what he was doing, went—and home plate was left uncovered.

Like a flash Dan started for the plate. Rice lost his head entirely and blindly slammed the ball straight for home. Dan crossed with the championship-winning tally as the ball cracked sharply against the backstop.

As soon as he could tear himself away from the handshakes of his team-mates Dixon made his way over to the Winchester players' bench and sought out Rice, whom he faced squarely.

"Look here, old man, you must have misunderstood me out there on the field. It was all my fault, bumping into you like that, and I want to apologize.

I'm sorry, and I hope you weren't hurt. Will you shake?"

He held out his hand towards the other. But Rice favoured him with a look of hatred and without warning struck aside the outstretched hand with his own left while with his right he gave Dan a stinging slap in the face!

Instantly a ring was formed and they went at it. The fight was fast and furious while it lasted. But it didn't last long for Rice was a good fifteen pounds heavier than his opponent, besides which he had considerable science. And the first thing Dan knew, he was sitting on the ground with a strange ringing in his ears.

He rose to his feet and smiled good-naturedly.

"Rice, you're a better scrapper than I am, I guess."

He crossed the impromptu ring and once more extended his hand to his conqueror. But Rice merely looked at him contemptuously and turned his back.

Danny was dumfounded. Such actions had never found place in his scheme of life. He pulled himself together, walked rapidly after Rice and seizing his shoulder, whirled him around until he faced him.

"Put up your guard, Rice! We're going to do it all over again!"

This time Dan was thoroughly mad. He fought hammer and tongs and kept his arms working like pistons, on the offensive every instant. And this time the result was different. It was Rice who sat on

the ground and held his head. And as an evidence that he had learned his lesson, it was Rice who, when he had picked himself up, extended his hand to Danny, who seized it and gave it a hearty squeeze.

But during his last year at Holbrooke Danny had spent many hours in perplexing thought. He was considerably disturbed within himself, for he seemed, as far as he could see, to have no definite aim in life. All the other fellows he knew had set their minds and hearts on the accomplishment of some particular object. Hart was going to be a lawyer; Allison was interested in architecture; medicine attracted Parker; and Bangs was already plugging civil engineering.

And so through the list each of them seemed to have picked out the niche he was going to fill in life and some were already making preparations to fill them.

But he himself could not seem to make up his mind where he belonged. He pondered on the professions, but they had no appeal for him. He went over in his mind the various industries and businesses with whose general characteristics he was acquainted, but they left him cold.

During his vacations he had always worked in the drug-store in the village where he lived. And, although he was interested in his work to a certain extent, he could not bring himself to look forward to a life of pill- and powder-mixing.

He discussed the matter with his uncle, but that worthy only shook his head.

“That’s a point that only one can settle—and

that one is yourself, Danny boy. I felt the same at your age, but I followed the lines of least resistance and became a carpenter just because my father was a carpenter. And now, sometimes, when I read in books of what men have done with no more start than I had, I am sorrowful. So take your time, lad. You've plenty of it. And it will come to you some day like a flash, when you're least looking for it."

Dan had felt somewhat easier after this talk for he had supposed, as boys are apt to, that he was the only boy in the world who had ever felt that way. And it was a relief to know that he wasn't.

But he did not stop thinking of the topic. Indeed, it was always uppermost in his mind, and as the weeks wore on that heralded the close approach of his graduation from Holbrooke, he began to be worried. For he had always expected to step from the commencement platform right out into Life, and now it began to look as though he wouldn't.

After he had received his diploma and the final ceremonies had been observed, he returned to his uncle's home no nearer the solution of his vital problem than ever.

Just before he went to bed the first night after his return he said to his uncle, "I suppose I'd better go back to work in the drug-store for the time being?"

The older man laid down the book he had been reading and puffed awhile on his briar pipe.

"No, Dan," he said after a moment's thought, "I don't think I'd do that if I were you. That's

how I became a carpenter—working with my father during vacations and then, when my schooling was ended I went back to it—‘for the time being,’ as you put it.”

“But, Uncle,” said Dan in a mildly expostulatory voice, “what *else* will I do?”

“Do nothing for awhile, lad,” smiled the sage. “You’re tired now after your hard year’s work at the school. A few weeks of loafing, fishing, and tramping through the woods and fields will put you in better condition to wrestle with your problem. And some one of these fine days your answer will come, hand in hand with opportunity.”

Dan took the advice, and glad enough he was to get it, too. For what healthy, red-blooded fellow wants to spend the warm summer days in a stuffy old drug-store when the woods and waters of the Great Outdoors are calling him to come and—*live*?

And so, for a couple of weeks he thoroughly enjoyed himself, starting off sometimes at dawn with fishpole or gun, taking his dinner from the trees or streams and cooking it over an open fire, and seldom returning until the western hills had claimed the sun.

On other days, however, he fared forth empty-handed. These were the serious days—the days upon which he roamed quietly through the countryside and gave himself up to thought—thought of himself and of his future.

It was upon such a day that he had happened upon the meadow where one of the companies of the Kirk

Kitson Pictures Corporation was engaged in taking scenes for a drama of the early West.

Dixon, like the average boy, had seen many moving-picture shows. And he had always watched them with more or less enjoyment. He was discerning enough to appreciate a good picture even when it was not of the type he preferred. But after leaving the theatre he had seldom given them a thought other than to recall from some incidents of his daily life, some similar thing that he had seen upon the screen.

But as for being interested in their manufacture—why, that thought had never occurred to him. He had always just taken them for granted as he watched them unfold their stories before his eyes, and had supposed that they were—well, just made, that was all.

But when he watched, that summer's afternoon, and got a fleeting glimpse of "behind the scenes"; when he saw that big company of people painstakingly rehearsing each bit of action—each expression—each look of the eye a dozen times before the camera was brought into play; and when he realized that these people were engaged to appear in what would eventually amount to but a few feet of film and that they had been transported here for just a certain kind of scenery, he felt something stir within him. The industry of which this was a part was worthy of respect.

And when he drew close to MacQuarrie and heard him talk to his people and, a little later saw

him directing one or two of the scenes as they were rehearsed and then photographed, he came to know that this was no pigmy of a man giving up his time to trivialities. Here was a man with a highly developed brain and his was an occupation that must tax even such a brain. And he was filling a definite place in life!

Danny's own brain was in a whirl. He drank in eagerly every detail that his eyes could reach, and everything that he saw added to the fascination that was already taking hold of him. And when the accidental opportunity to become a part of this great game—for to him it seemed to present as keen and exciting an interest as any athletic contest he had ever participated in—offered itself, he could no more refuse than he could refuse his breakfast.

After the required scenes on this particular location had all been taken to MacQuarrie's satisfaction and the caravan of motor cars had sped down the road towards Fort Lee, where the studios were located, Danny raced for home.

Uncle Carter had not yet returned from his day's work and Mrs. Clancy, the elderly housekeeper was bustling about the little cottage kitchen preparing the simple evening meal.

Bursting with excitement Danny poured out a torrent of words unfolding the day's experiences and telling her of his "job." And when he told her that he was going to start work at the studios the next morning, the simple old soul wheeled about from the stove and held up her hands in holy horror.

"Th' movies, is it? Th' Saints presarve us!" she ejaculated. "An' is it a movie-actor your good, kind, God-fearin' uncle has raised an' eddicated ye to be?"

"No, no, Mrs. Clancy, you don't understand. I'm not going to be an actor."

"Thin what is it you're tellin' me about goin' to worruk in th' movies?"

Dan explained once more, but it was useless. Try as he may, the good old lady insisted that it was an actor they wanted to make of him, and that he wouldn't find it out until it was too late. If he had the sense of a gnat, she told him pointedly, he'd stay by his Uncle Carter, and become a fine carpenter and a credit to the neighbourhood, and not be destroying his chances for the presidency by becoming a movie-actor.

"But wait 'til your uncle comes home, me laddy-buck! He'll knock that foine notion ye have into a cocked hat, or I'm no cook."

Dan grew serious at that. The possibility that his Uncle Carter might not approve of the occupation to which he was about to give himself had not occurred to him before. So thoroughly had he become imbued with the enthusiasm which the day's revelations had inspired within him that he had not stopped to consider that angle of the situation. Supposing Uncle Carter should refuse to sanction his action? Dan hated the thought, for he owed his uncle too much to disregard his fatherly interest now.

And he knew, too, that his uncle, in common with the great majority of others, looked upon the business—well, as just “movies.” Indeed, had he himself not so regarded it up to today? And would he not have still felt so had the little peek that accident had given him of the real inside of the industry not told him that it *was* an industry, and one quite worthy of the name?

The thought worried him, and he began to wish that he had a few days instead of hours before he started to work, not to think it over—his mind was made up!—but to convince his uncle that motion-picture production as it exists is an entirely different thing from what people thought.

His uncle’s step on the little back veranda interrupted his cogitations and he opened the door to greet him.

“Well, Danny, and how are you this fine evening? Good-evening to you, Mrs. Clancy. My, but the supper smells good! What have you done with yourself today, boy?”

“Oh, lots of things, Uncle Carter!”

The older man stopped on his way to the hook where he hung his coat and gave Danny’s face a quick, keen glance. The suppressed eagerness in the boy’s voice and the excitement shining in his eyes told him better than words that something big was happening inside him. And his own great heart felt a glow of joy at the thought that perhaps the boy had at last found the solution of his problem.

Conversation came difficult at the table that night. The usual discussion of the day's events and the good-natured bantering were missing. Danny himself could hardly eat and, when his uncle commented jocularly on the fact, he blushed nervously and stammered that he guessed he wasn't very hungry.

"Humph!" snorted Mrs. Clancy with great disdain from her seat at the foot of the table. "Ye'll see many's th' day whin ye *will* be, I'm thinkin'!"

Uncle Carter gave her a quick look and lifted his eyebrows inquiringly. But the housekeeper had no more to say; she only lifted her pug nose higher in a contemptuous sniff.

After the meal was finished, Uncle Carter flung an affectionate arm about his nephew's broad young shoulders and led him out to the rustic settee under the old elm tree beside the cottage.

"Tell me all about it, boy," he said kindly when they had seated themselves and he had filled his pipe with fragrant tobacco. "Have you found your answer?"

The words came haltingly at first, for Mrs. Clancy's attitude and her prophecy of his uncle's stand was still before him. But as he talked he forgot everything but the one big subject that now seemed to fill his life.

He described, with simple rhetoric but unbounded enthusiasm, the things he had seen that day: the businesslike activity of the company, the painstaking accuracy of each move, the tremendous amount of capital that must be involved if so much could be

spent to obtain a few short scenes, his impression of the director, MacQuarrie, and all the rest of it.

When he had done, he looked anxiously at his uncle. But the older man's face expressed nothing. He puffed quietly on his pipe for a few minutes during which nothing could be heard but the rattle of the dishes through the kitchen window and the drowsy chirp of a tired robin.

"And you start in the morning?" he asked at last.

Dan's heart gave a great leap.

"Then you'll let me go?" he exclaimed.

"Let you go? My boy, I have no voice in the matter. I told you months ago that this was a question that only yourself could settle. It seems that you have settled it. I could wish, perhaps, that you had taken more time to consider it, but when Opportunity knocks—why, that's the time to act. I have never given much thought to moving pictures, nor the kind of people that make them. But a good boy will keep himself good wherever he is. That will be his first and foremost thought always. Next, he will always be a gentleman. And finally, he will do his work as well as he can. But it isn't as though you were going far away, is it, boy? Fort Lee is but a few miles off, and we'll have a chance to see you often. And now—to bed with you! The best way to start on a new job, you know, is on top of a good night's sleep. So good-night, lad. I'll call you in the morning."

Somehow Dan felt strangely older. He was



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about to launch into Life. But elation was his predominant emotion. For he knew he had found his answer. And on the morrow he was about to begin carving himself a niche in the work of the world.

CHAPTER THREE

HIS NEW JOB

HHEY! You, Dixon! Grab these chairs and lug them over to stage number four where the comedy company's working. Atta boy! Show some pep!"

Danny seized the articles in question, one in each hand, and set off as directed down the studio towards stage number four.

"Who gave you those?" he was asked when he arrived.

"The property-man, sir."

"Well, go back and tell him I don't want them. I called for two bentwood chairs. Don't Meadows know the difference between a willow and a bentwood chair yet? Hump yourself! I'm waiting for them!"

Dan trotted back past the first three stages, sought out Meadows and delivered the message.

"Aw rats! Why didn't he say what he wanted in the first place? Come on, we've got to go over to the prop.-room. You see," he confided with a good-natured grin as they walked along, "I knew what he wanted, all right, but these two chairs here were in use on stage number one, and they just finished with them so I thought I could slip them

over to him without him noticin' the difference. It would save me a trip to the prop.-room. See? You can often save yourself a lot of work that way. But you'll get wise to a lot of those tricks after a while."

"I'll bet I won't!" said Dan to himself.

For that didn't conform to his idea of working. That sounded more like shirking, and he wondered if much of it was tolerated here.

He was to find out before long that the loudest cry of the motion-picture industry was for men and boys who would not spend their time in dodging work. Shirkers were tolerated because they were better than nothing, although frequently not worth one-tenth of what they were paid. But the workers forged ahead so rapidly that it was sometimes hard to keep track of their progress. In such a rapidly expanding business there is always a demand higher up which must be filled from below. For here is an industry which must educate its own, and cannot draw its men ready-trained from other sources.

They were standing now before a great double door, not unlike a barn door, upon which was painted in large black letters "PROPERTY-ROOM—KEEP OUT!" Meadows inserted a key in the lock and slid back the doors enough to admit his own body, leaving Dixon to push them apart sufficiently to admit the chairs he was carrying.

Inside the huge room—it was, in fact, more of a hall—Dan stopped and stared. For never in all of his life had he seen or imagined such a conglomer-

ation of—*things*. For it was impossible to classify the objects that met his eye any more specifically.

The hall was divided into wide aisles by plank stalls, some of which were subdivided horizontally by shelves. These stalls and shelves were literally filled to overflowing, so much so that many articles were suspended on stout lines hung from nails driven into the wood of the stalls.

They contained, as far as Dan could make out, at least one of everything in the whole world, and sometimes many of the same thing. Canon of the Civil War type, an ancient Egyptian mummy-case, blackboards, office furniture, a royal throne, machine-guns, moose-heads, two or three canoes, coal-hods, oil-paintings, an automobile body, a furnace, saddles of all kinds from the dainty English type to the cumbersome "rocking-chair" of the Mexican vaquero, stepladders, chest-protectors, and—things without end were there.

For everything that is used in the making of a picture, with the exception of the scenery itself and the costumes, comes out of the property-room. If it is such an oddity that it is not contained there and if it cannot be borrowed or rented (as is sometimes the case with expensive things), it is bought, and, after it has been used, it, too, goes into the property-room. And when one considers that dozens of pictures of perhaps as many different types or periods may be under production in a single year in some of the larger studios, one begins to realize what a property-room must contain.

But it occurred to Dan, as he used his eyes on everything that presented itself that, for all of the confusion that was apparent on account of the dissimilarity of the objects, there was still a definite order prevailing in their arrangement. For example, he noted that everything pertaining to warfare was kept together—rifles, machine-guns, trench helmets, hand-grenades, swords, etc. The stalls containing these were labelled "ARMORY". And everything pertaining to water, from canoes and paddles to sextants, deck-compasses and propellers, were grouped together under the caption "MARINE PROPS." Furniture, too, of which there was an enormous quantity, filled another set of stalls and was subdivided into "office," "drawing-room," "library," "dining-room," "boudoir," "rustic," "period," etc.

Dan drew a deep breath as he turned to find Hank Meadows smiling good-humouredly at him.

"Funny, ain't it?" the property-man asked. "But you can look it over some other time. Come on, now, and I'll show you how to find what you want, in case I have to send you in here for me sometime."

Meadows had already noticed that the new utility boy seemed unusually willing to work and had decided to show him how to do a number of things that might take some of the burden from his own none-too-eager shoulders. Dixon caught the idea at once, but he made no objection. He was there to learn, and he wanted to learn it all.

Against the wall at one end of the hall to the right of the big double doors stood a filing cabinet with many rows of drawers. These held thousands of cards, on each of which was inscribed the name and brief description of an article or articles belonging to the prop.-room, together with the place in which it belonged—aisle, stall, and shelf. As soon as an article was taken from the room its card was taken out of its regular place, marked with the number of the stage upon which it was being used and filed in a special drawer which was marked "PROPS IN USE."

In this way accurate account was kept of every property belonging to the studio. And woe betide the property-man who cannot produce or account for a prop. when the director calls for it!

All this Hank explained to Dan, and then, to test him (and incidentally save himself a few steps) he made him hunt up the card for bentwood chairs and find the place in which they were kept.

As he wound his way through the aisles and around the corners towards the location indicated on the card Dan was surprised to see a rusty shoe and khaki-clad leg protruding from the edge of a comfortable looking bed. He looked closer and beheld his acquaintance of yesterday, Eddie Jordan, sleeping peacefully on the downy mattress. He smiled to himself as he hurried by.

Having secured the chairs he returned. The sound of his footsteps evidently disturbed the sleeper, for as he turned into the aisle where the bed stood,

he was amused to see the foot disappear quickly. He stepped into full view and greeted the other with a cheery "Hello, Eddie!"

"Whew!" Eddie mopped the perspiration from his forehead and breathed a sigh of relief. "Gee, I thought you were Hank. If he catches me taking it easy again he'll fire me on the spot. He told me so the last time he caught me here."

"Then why do you do it?"

"Aw gosh, Dan, I'm tired. I was up late last night, so when we were in here a couple of hours ago getting some stuff for stage two, I hid until they locked the door. What time is it now?"

"Eleven-thirty," answered Dan, consulting his watch.

Eddie yawned and stretched.

"Guess I'll sneak out then. It's almost time to eat."

"But won't you be seen coming out?"

"Naw! There's a grating on the other side that leads into the scenery-loft and I'll squeeze through that."

If this boy and Hank Meadows were the types of competitors that he was going to have in his battle for success, thought Dan, he wouldn't fear much. They had the advantage of an early start, but this they were completely wasting through their shiftless disregard of their duties and opportunities.

At the beginning of the lunch hour, when, for the first time since he had reported at eight o'clock that morning he had nothing to do, since all of his

superiors (and every one in the place seemed to be his superior, for they all gave him orders) were making their way to the restaurant, Eddie hunted him up.

"Come on, Dan," he invited, "let's go over and eat. Are you any hungrier than you were yesterday on location?"

"Am I! Well, I should say I am! I haven't had a thing to eat since five o'clock this morning and I'm starved. Where's there a restaurant?"

"There's one right on the grounds. The company runs it for the people who work for them. Come on with me and we'll eat together, eh?"

As they stepped out of the studio into the warmth of the summer noon, Dixon stopped abruptly at the sight that greeted them. Would this fascinating industry never stop surprising him? He wanted to rub his eyes and pinch himself, for surely such a sight belonged only in some kind of a dream, or else, perhaps, at a great masquerade ball.

The restaurant, a plain one-story frame building, stood in a little depression of the ground a good stone's throw from the studio, and towards it from all directions, flocked the most amazing kind of people imaginable. Men in full dress and ladies in gorgeous evening gowns walked arm-in-arm with tall flannel-shirted and heavily-bearded miners; East Indian princes, Australian bushmen, ballet dancers, nuns, cowboys, fairies, queerly painted comedians with mouths that stretched from ear to ear, and, as it seemed to Dan, a thousand other outlandish-

looking people, approached the restaurant and disappeared through the door.

But aside from their costumes, he noted a most peculiar colouring on their faces. Odd shades appeared in entirely unexpected places. Solid yellow on the cheeks with deep dabs of a light reddish hue under the eyes were the most common colours that he saw.

"Tell me, Eddie," he asked, "what makes their faces look so funny?"

"Make-up," was the laconic reply.

"Make-up? What's that?"

"Why, the grease-paint, you know."

"But you don't mean to say that they really paint themselves those colours intentionally, do you? They aren't at all natural-looking. They make them look as though they had some kind of a strange disease, don't they?"

"Sure they do," responded Eddie, who was only too glad of the opportunity to display his superior knowledge, "—out here," he added. "But in the studio they use Cooper-Hewitt lights, on account of the natural light not being strong enough, and under those lights these colours look more natural, so that, when they are photographed, they make the faces look much better than they would if they didn't have those queer paints on them."

"Oh, I see!" said Danny. He took a deep breath and then exclaimed, "My, but aren't there a lot of wonderful things to learn about this business?"

"Oh, I suppose there are, if you want to bother," was the indifferent response.

They had crossed the space between the studio and the restaurant as they talked and now they entered the building. Small tables were scattered in great numbers all over the floor of the big room, three sides of which were lined with counters, and from behind these, men in businesslike white coats served the patrons.

Danny ordered some appetizing soup, a couple of meat sandwiches and a glass of milk. Eddie's order was substantially the same with the exception of coffee, which he substituted for milk. Their lunches were served to them on trays, and Eddie discovered a corner table which was not occupied and they threaded their way to it.

Dan was so fascinated by the sights around them that Eddie was forced to remind him, from time to time, to eat his lunch. But so many interesting things presented themselves to his eager eyes that, hungry as he was, he would rather have gone the rest of the day without eating than to have missed a single detail of the scene.

At the table next to where they were sitting was one of the East Indian princes they had seen outside. Between the bites of a chicken sandwich he was earnestly discussing, in typical Times Square English, the progress of the New York Giants with the sombre-looking Quaker who sat on his right. Opposite him a Spanish toreador casually munched a

salad while he scanned the financial columns of the morning paper. The fourth person at the table could hardly be seen. He was a midget, scarcely thirty inches tall with a big putty nose of bright yellow nearly five inches in length, which was continually getting in his way as he ate. He held a sandwich in one hand, while the other clung tenaciously to a long black cigar, puffs of which alternated with bites of the sandwich, as he chipped an occasional word in the baseball argument across the table.

The table adjoining this queer quartette was occupied by a Red Cross Nurse who seemed to be relishing a hot frankfurter sandwich amazingly; an Indian princess, whose taste ran to pickles; a Colonial dame with white wig and hoop-skirts that made her sit two feet away from the table and reach forward for every forkful of her cold meat; and a fat jolly-looking washerwoman, who, according to Eddie, was the most talented comedienne and character actress in any of the Kitson companies. The sedate Colonial dame was entertaining the other three with a vivacious account of a trip in an airplane she had taken the Sunday previous, and the dusky Indian girl was contributing comments in a broken Italian dialect that caused much good-natured laughter.

Danny's eyes were sparkling and he could hardly sit still as he looked around him. It seemed strange, but he actually thought that Eddie and he must look out of place, being among the few who were dressed,

as he put it in his letter to his uncle that night, "at all civilized."

There were a few others, though, who were not in costume. Among them, in another corner of the dining-hall, Dixon recognized Douglas MacQuarrie. He was dressed much the same as he had been on location the day previous, and Dan was quick to observe that, true to Eddie's description, he was still "doing something." He had a manuscript propped up on the table before him and beside it, open, lay a small black notebook, in which, from time to time, he made notations.

Seated opposite him, with another notebook and pencil, was a fleshy, dark-haired fellow of about twenty-four or five, Dan guessed. There was a certain arrogant air about him that seemed quite uncalled for, especially in the presence of MacQuarrie, under whose authority he undoubtedly was.

"That's Hugh Hammerson, Mac's assistant director," remarked Jordan as he followed Dan's eyes. "He's a big stiff. Swaggers around as though he knew it all, and owned the studio. And what he *don't* know would fill plenty of books, I'll tell you."

"What does an assistant director do?" asked Dan interestedly, but still keeping his eyes on MacQuarrie's table.

"Why, he just helps out his director—gets things ready for him, hunts up the right kind of locations for exterior scenes, and then, sometimes, if he



What does an assistant director do?" asked Dan
interestedly



catches on right, the boss lets him direct some of the scenes that aren't very important. MacQuarrie has never let Hammerson direct though, not since the first time. He made an awful mess of it. MacQuarrie is probably telling him now about the kinds of locations he wants for some new picture. But come on—let's get back to the studio."

They started for the door, but on the way Eddie stopped suddenly to inquire, "Have you got any cigarettes? No? Then wait a minute—I'll get some."

He stepped over to the counter by the cashier's desk and returned a moment later with a package of smokes, one of which he offered to Dan. To his apparent surprise his companion refused courteously.

"What's the matter? Don't you use them?"

"No, thanks. I never got the habit."

"That's funny. How'd that happen?"

"Well, Eddie, I've known men who've gone to an awful lot of trouble to get rid of the cigarette habit. So what's the use of forming a habit that those who have are so anxious to lose?"

"Aw, that's all nonsense!" scoffed Eddie, as he lit up one of the white cylinders and puffed complacently. "Why, listen—they're great for your head. I wake up nearly every morning now with a headache, and if I didn't smoke a cigarette before breakfast it would never stop aching."

"Did you ever happen to think, Eddie, that if you *didn't* smoke them, perhaps your head would never *start* aching?"

But Eddie, having no answer for this neat thrust, quickly changed the subject.

They had not spent much time in the restaurant—not nearly as much as Dan had wanted to in order to enjoy the unusual scene—and when they entered the studio they found it practically deserted. Eddie was in favour of making himself comfortable on a couch which was being used in one of the sets but Dan, after a little persuasion, prevailed upon him to accompany him on a tour of the studio.

Although he had been there all morning, Dixon had been kept so busy running back and forth that he had only caught fleeting glimpses of the furnishings and layout of the place. He had marvelled from the very beginning though, at the huge building itself which was constructed almost entirely of small panes of glass, both as to the four walls (with the exception of the ten or twelve feet nearest the ground, which was of reinforced concrete), and the roof, so that it resembled nothing in the world but a mammoth hothouse many times larger than any hothouse could be, thought Dan. He was quick to surmise, however, and quite correctly, that the studio was so built in order to admit as much natural light as possible, thus improving photographic conditions.

Built along the inside of the concrete part of the wall were the dressing-rooms, directors' offices and projection rooms, which were separated here and there by fire exits. Some of the dressing-rooms, according to Eddie, were elaborately furnished, as,

frequently a performer retains his connection with the same studio for months or even years at a time, and so has an opportunity of making his or her quarters as comfortable as desired.

The great floor of the building was divided off by lines of white paint into ten or a dozen approximately equal sections, each of which was identified by a neatly lettered sign bearing the inscription "Stage Number So-and-So." They were not stages in the sense of being raised platforms, but merely clearly-defined sections of the studio within the bounds of which each company confined itself religiously while working on a picture. Of course the individual members of any company were free to move about as they liked when they were not actually engaged in a scene that was being rehearsed or photographed as long as they did not interfere with any one's else work, and they frequently paid visits to members of companies working on other stages. But the work of a company was not allowed to encroach upon stage space that was in use by any other company.

Sometimes, to be sure, the requirements of size made it necessary for a company to use the space of several adjoining stages for a single scene. Eddie described one production which the Kitson corporation had made in which the entire studio was converted into one gigantic stage and set to represent a ruined Belgian village.

"Usually, of course, they build those big sets outdoors on some good location. But this was in the

middle of winter when the days were short and they knew they'd have to do a lot of the photography at night. And as long as they couldn't get as good light outside after dark they built it in the studio. Gee! But wasn't it a whopper, though! I wish I had half the money it cost!"

"But do they work at night, too?" asked Dan in surprise.

"Not ordinarily," was the reply. "But once in a while it happens that, through bad weather or some other reason, a picture won't be done on schedule time if they don't. And then—by cracky! You should see the way they work! Sometimes until two or three o'clock in the morning. I've known times when MacQuarrie and Charlie Goldberg, his chief camera-man, haven't left this studio for forty-eight hours at a stretch!"

Here was more food for thought. Dixon wondered how many people as they sat in comfortable theatres watching some particularly good photoplay, realized the great amount of work and self-sacrifice that were involved in creating their entertainment. Not many, he'd wager! His respect for this industry was growing rapidly, and he was more eager than ever to fit himself to become a more useful cog in this great machine.

"Here's the set that MacQuarrie and Goldberg are working on now," remarked Eddie as they came to a stage that was fitted out to represent the inside of a log cabin.

"Why do you call it a set? I thought they were all stages."

"Well, they *are* stages. They're *all* stages, you know. But when they have scenery and props fixed on them all ready for work, they're sets. Do you see?" To himself he said, "Gee, but this fellow certainly can ask questions! He wants to know everything."

He was quite right. That was just what Dan was after—to learn all he could. And he determined that if there was anything that he didn't learn, it wouldn't be his fault.

It was nearing the end of the lunch hour now and Eddie suggested that they start back for the other end of the studio. As they passed the various stages and sets on their way back Dan stopped several times to examine more closely the way they were arranged and to marvel at the perfection of detail and the completeness of the illusion which they effected.

In the log-cabin set, for example, nothing was lacking in realism from the smoky oil lamp in the wall bracket over the iron sink and the soiled roller-towel that hung on a nail beside the pump, to the braided rag mat on the floor and the big iron kettle on the angle-irons at the fireplace. Why, even to the dust on the worn Bible which rested on the crude shelf over the fireplace, every detail was perfect. There were only three side walls to the cabin, so that action between those walls could be photographed with the camera at sufficient distance to include

everything within the cabin in its scope. And there was no roof, for these scenes were lighted from overhead. And lighting is a most important factor in the making of motion pictures.

This, as Dan was to find, was a customary arrangement of an interior set—no ceiling and three walls. Frequently, indeed, only two walls, representing the corner of a room, were used. And, occasionally, only a single wall acted as the background for the action.

Another stage that caught Dan's attention was set to represent the inside of an East Indian palace, and the elaborate hangings and rich draperies showed that a rare artistic sense had directed their arrangement. This suggested another question to him.

"Who has charge of arranging all these things—picking out the right ones to use and seeing to it that they are used in the right place and the right way?"

"The director is boss of all that," answered Eddie. "It's up to him to see that everything's right."

One set represented a courtroom, and one the catacombs of ancient Rome. Another, which was in use by a company engaged in the picturization of a well-known college story, was such a perfect replica of a thoroughly equipped gymnasium that for a moment Dan experienced a pang of loneliness for the days, but late departed, when he had trained in just such a gym at good old Holbrooke.

He could see himself in his gym togs flying about



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on the swinging rings. He could almost feel the grip of the horizontal bar in his hands and the sliding of the seat as he worked out on the rowing machine. He could—

“Hey, you! W'atcha lookin' at?”

CHAPTER FOUR

DAN MAKES AN ENEMY

HIS day-dream was shattered by a coarse voice behind him. He turned quickly in some confusion and saw that the speaker was none other than Hugh Hammerson, of whom Eddie had given him such an unfavourable impression over in the restaurant. Eddie himself had continued on his way and was by this time halfway down the studio.

Hammerson, although Dan of course had no means of knowing it, had just been given a severe call-down by MacQuarrie for not doing a number of things that he should have done, and for doing a number of things that he should not have done. And when MacQuarrie administered a call-down he did it just as thoroughly as he did everything else. His tongue became a whip-lash and his eyes poured hot acid into the wounds his tongue made. And Hammerson's calibre was of that small, mean variety that when such a thing happened to him—and they had been happening with increasing frequency of late—he always sought out some one upon whom he could vent the wrath he dared not show his superior—some one whom he considered a subordinate.

When he saw Dixon standing in rapt admiration before the gymnasium set, his bullying nature could not refrain from making it unpleasant for the new utility man.

"What do you mean by standing there doing nothing?" he demanded in a loud, blustering voice.

Dan measured him quietly with his eye. Although he was in the habit of forming his own conclusions about people regardless of others' criticisms, something seemed to tell him as he faced Hammerson that his opinion of the big fellow was going to agree pretty well with that which Eddie Jordan had voiced. His loud tones did not disturb Dan. On the contrary they rather set him at ease. For at first he had had an idea that perhaps Hammerson amounted to something around the studio and that he had unwittingly done something to offend. But a moment's consideration of that voice changed his mind. People who amount to much do not have to yell to be impressive, he reflected. So he was coldly courteous in his answer.

"Is the lunch hour over?" he asked.

"Don't you know whether it is or not?"

"I don't think it is. But this is my first day here and I might be mistaken."

Ah! thought Hammerson. His first day—here was fine prey!

"Your first day, huh? Where'd you come from, the Consolidated?"

Dan wondered what that meant and decided to ask.

"What's the Consolidated?"

"You know what the Consolidated is as well as I do! They sent you here to get a job so you could spy on us, didn't they? Who sent you, Bellamy or Porter?"

Members of some of the companies, who were returning to the respective sets upon which they were about to resume work, were passing them now and they glanced curiously at the pair, attracted by Hammerson's loud words and his reference to the rival corporation. Their more or less indifferent attention flattered the big fellow and he decided to make the most of this opportunity to impress them with his self-assumed importance.

Dan felt like laughing aloud at the absurdity of the other's accusation, but he only said:

"I'm afraid you're mistaken. I don't know either of the gentlemen."

"Oh, you don't, eh? *Maybe* you don't. *You* say you don't. You didn't hear *me* say you don't, did you?" he shouted.

Danny hesitated a moment as though considering. Then he said, with mock seriousness:

"No-o-o, come to think of it, I can't recall having heard you make such a statement in my hearing."

Hammerson was getting nettled now. Some one snickered behind his back, but he was afraid to turn for fear they would laugh in his face. He began to grow red, but determined to carry his bluff through to the finish.

Dixon looked at the little knot of people who had gathered, and one tall athletic-looking fellow in a running suit who was evidently a member of the company using the gymnasium set, gave him a friendly smile and a funny wink. Dan smiled back, while Hammerson continued to rave.

"I ain't askin' you to recall anythin', d'ye hear? When I want any recallin' done I'll do it myself, see? You ain't goin' to last long around *this* studio, I can tell you that, young feller! We don't want any more fresh guys like you around here. We've had enough of them. So you'd better get onto yourself and mighty quick, too. D'ye understand?"

But Dan was doing his utmost to keep from howling with laughter at the comical expression on the athletic fellow's face as he mocked Hammerson and mimicked his every gesture.

"D'ye understand me?" screamed Hammerson.

Dan controlled himself with an effort and replied:

"I'm afraid I wasn't listening to you. Would you mind going over it again?"

A hearty laugh arose from the group of spectators, which had increased appreciably in numbers. Hammerson turned purple with rage at thus being made a monkey of by one whom he had marked for his prey. But he was due for more complete mortification the next moment, for as the laughter subsided a quiet, cutting voice called:

"Hammerson!"

He turned quickly to face MacQuarrie, who had seen the crowd and had approached unnoticed.

"What are you doing here?" he demanded.

As he felt those black eyes on him again and recalled the bitter tongue-lashing he had just received, the bully wished himself anywhere but in the particular spot he was occupying.

"Why—er—you see, Mr. MacQuarrie, this fellow here, I think the Consolidated sent him, and—"

MacQuarrie bent his sharp eyes on Dixon in a soul-searching look, which the younger man met unwaveringly.

"What makes you think so?" demanded the director, still keeping his eyes on the newcomer.

"Why, he—he looks kind of suspicious, and I—I thought I'd better—"

MacQuarrie looked back at Hammerson now and the bully lowered his eyes.

"Well, I—I thought he did, Mr. MacQuarrie—honest. You should have seen him before you came—"

"Hammerson, about fifteen minutes ago I called you something. What was it?"

Hammerson shifted his weight from one foot to the other and tried to dig a hole in the floor with the toe of his shoe. He hated to answer but he didn't dare refuse or pretend forgetfulness.

"A blithering idiot, I guess."

"You *know*," corrected the other. "And you agreed with me, didn't you?"

Hammerson hung his head in shame at the tittering that emanated from the circle of onlookers.

"Yes, sir," he mumbled.

"Well, Hammerson, I'll add to that now by calling you a brainless fool! Now you get down to the set where you belong and don't you budge out of it until I tell you to. Hop!"

And Hammerson hopped. But as he passed Dan he shot him a black look through bloodshot eyes that seemed to tell him he had made an enemy. It didn't worry him, though, as he was due to report to Hank Meadows, and he was soon so busily engaged in his new duties that he completely forgot the incident.

The afternoon passed quickly for Dixon, who continued to absorb everything in the way of information that came his way. He asked questions whenever he had the chance and when he came across something that he didn't understand he made a note of it for future reference.

What he considered a great piece of luck befell him during the afternoon. Hank Meadows gave him the key to the property-room and told him to get a mission bookcase that was wanted for a library interior that was being set on one of the stages near at hand. When he had located the stall in which the library furniture was kept and had selected the case which he thought would fulfil requirements, he was mildly surprised to find that it was filled with books.

On second thought, though, it did not seem so strange, for no director, he considered, would have an empty bookcase in a library set. But as he dusted

it his eye fell on a volume which was titled "An Elementary Handbook of Motion Picture Photography."

So eager was he to familiarize himself with every phase of his new business that he was at once consumed with a burning desire to read that book. He put the case on a small hand-truck and rolled it over to the stage where it was to be used and then, returning the key to Meadows, asked if it would be possible for him to take the book home with him that night if he'd be sure to bring it back the next morning.

Meadows looked curiously at him. He was sitting in an armchair near the door of the property-room, sorting over some small properties that had just been returned from a set that was being struck, and he motioned to Dan to help him.

"What do you want it for?"

"Why, to read, of course."

Meadows laughed a bit.

"You'll get over that. Take it if you want, and keep it until you've finished it—if you ever do. I've seen a lot of them like you, Dixon, that started off like a house afire and wanted to learn the whole film game in a day. They're great as long as it lasts, and they'll work like truck-horses. But after a couple of days they cool off a little and begin to take an interest in other things besides their work. Then they lose all interest in their work and you can't get any good out of them at all. You wait a week and see how much reading you'll be doing. I'll

bet a hat you never finish a hundred pages of that book!"

A shade of annoyance crossed Dan's face. He did not like to have his ambitions taken so trivially.

"Those other fellows that you're talking about—they couldn't have really liked it or else they would have stuck to it."

"They liked it at first all right, just like you do. But the novelty wore off and they were cured."

"Then they only *thought* they liked it," retorted Dan. "If you really *like* anything, you don't just 'get over it.' It takes something real to make you change. Don't you like your job?"

"Me?" Hank smiled disdainfully. "I should say not."

"Why not?" persisted Dan.

"Why, because—there's altogether too much work for one man."

Dan could not restrain a smile at this. For this was the first bit of actual work that he had seen Hank perform that day, and the only reason he was doing this, Dan knew, was because it was a sitting-down job. The rest of the work he had delegated to Eddie Jordan (when he could find that elusive lad) or to Dan himself. He realized now just what the trouble with Hank Meadows was. He was a chronic sufferer of acutely inflamed laziness, for which there has been discovered no permanent cure that can be administered externally. The best rem-

edy is a good stiff dose of hunger, taken internally. The most severe cases have been known to succumb to this treatment.

It must not be thought, however, that all studio employees are of the shiftless, lazy variety. They are not, by any means. But the film industry is such an infant among industries, and its mushroom growth has been so abnormally rapid, that it has been impossible to train enough men to handle all jobs as they should be handled. Indeed, it is hardly fair to speak of training men in the production field, for what training they have received is what they have acquired through observation. And a man's education is usually the product of his own mistakes and those of others by which he has profited. And so, since the average company has been expanding more rapidly than able men could be absorbed into the industry, it has been necessary, to a greater or less extent, to tolerate some who manifest but little ability to fill vacancies caused by the promotion of others to duties of greater responsibility.

These facts, of course, had not yet come into Dan's possession; but he had used his faculty of observation to the extent of noticing that some of those with whom he had come in contact did not seem, even to his inexperienced mind, to be as capable or enthusiastic about their jobs as they should be. And this, he shrewdly concluded, should make the opportunity greater for any one who would *make* himself capable of filling a responsible position and who, when he had won a place, would exercise every

effort to fill it better than it had ever been filled before.

Surely, thought Dan, here was a fertile field for effort!

He took the book with him when he left the studio at the end of his day's work, and read it as he ate his supper. After finishing the meal he looked about for lodgings and finally found a modestly furnished room with a private family that just about satisfied his needs. After writing a long and enthusiastic letter to his Uncle Carter he opened his book again and settled down for a good read.

He read slowly and made sure that he understood each paragraph before going on with the next. He studied each plate as reference was made to it in the text. And when he finished a chapter he reviewed it in his mind and wrote out a brief summary of it in a notebook he had purchased for the purpose. He finished three chapters in this manner, took a short walk in the cool evening air to mail his letter and returning, went to bed.

The next morning found him up bright and early and after a cold sponge bath he dressed and sat down for another hour with his book, after which he ate a hearty breakfast and set out for the studio on foot.

As he walked, his conversation of yesterday with the cynical Hank Meadows recurred to him, and he wondered if it could be possible that the others who had failed to stick to their good intentions had been as earnest and enthusiastic as he was when they

started out; and if it could happen that he, too, would slip and fall by the wayside.

He recalled with a sinking sensation that during his course at Holbrooke he had, as each new term came around, made mighty resolutions that *this* term he would lead his class in this or that subject. And for several days he would work so hard, early and late, at his books, that his classmates would marvel and his teacher rejoice at the great strides he was making. But it had never lasted over a week. Always some foreign influence had attracted him after the first fever of accomplishment had burnt itself out, and it was usually athletics, he recalled. Invariably the prospects of a game of baseball, basketball, football or hockey would lure him from his firmest scholastic purpose like an irresistible magnet.

Well, he thought indulgently, he had always liked games. The wholesome excitement of conquest, the joy of victory and the indescribable thrill of battle—that's what it was he had liked! And he enjoyed training for them almost as much as he did the games themselves. What fun it had been to exercise his wrist, arm, and shoulders for the sake of putting more speed into the ball! And how he had enjoyed those hours in the gym which he had spent in developing the muscles of his sturdy right leg in order to attain greater distance in his drop-kicks, punts, and kick-offs!

His interest had never flagged in *these* subjects, he recalled. Nothing had been able to drag him

from the accomplishments of these ends. His eyes glistened at the memories.

And suddenly, like a haze that is burnt off by the sun, his fears were dissipated. For he saw with the clarity of intuition that these were the things to which his present work was to be compared—not with the dull routine of studies in which he had felt at best only a forced interest and his application to which had always cost him an effort away out of proportion to the object.

That was not the way he felt toward the studio and the things it stood for. His attitude towards them was identical with that which he had always taken towards his games, and he looked forward with eager anticipation to the day when he would be properly equipped to play a real 'varsity position in the film game.

And meanwhile, just as he had thoroughly enjoyed the training and practice that had made him an able athlete, so was he beginning to enjoy the work that was teaching him, bit by bit, the business in which he was determined to succeed. And he knew in that instant that fail he could not. And could his Uncle Carter have looked into his eyes at that moment he, too, would have known. And his heart would have been filled with rejoicing.

That day at the studio was much like the day before. Indeed, after the first day everything moved along about the same. Not that there was any monotony. Far from it. That is, and of necessity ever will be an unknown quantity in motion-pic-

ture producing. The constant craving on the part of the public for novelty in its entertainment is as constantly reflected in the studios by a persistent striving for new ideas—original scenarios, new effects, new types of actor and so forth. And Dan was keen to catch every new thing that he saw and to demand from some one who knew a thorough explanation of it. But the sameness was confined to Dan's duties, which were chiefly of the fetch, carry, and hold variety.

During these days his acquaintance with Eddie Jordan began to ripen into a real wholesome friendship which was not without its good effects on both. For Eddie had spent several years of his young life as utility or assistant property-man in various studios and his experience had given him a fund of practical if miscellaneous knowledge which, had he been more ambitious, would have been extremely valuable in pushing him up the ladder to a higher position. He had always been a drifter, however, and had never taken his job seriously. But Dan, by his persistent "whys" and "wherefores" derived no mean amount of information from him, which he added to the fast-increasing store which he was accumulating from other sources.

As he, on his part, regaled Eddie with many interesting stories of his life at the Military Academy, Eddie, whose scholastic education had been confined to a few desultory years at primary and grammar schools, listened with wistful interest to all he had to say and felt that in being deprived of those

rollicking days and happy associations he had been deprived of something that was his due.

But this was not the important benefit that Eddie derived from the friendship. He had worked at the Kitson Studios for eight months but he noticed that at the end of two weeks Dan was better known than he was. It was surprising, the number of people that knew him by name. And it was no longer unusual, when a director wanted some trivial thing done, but wanted it done in a particular way, for him to request specifically that it be done by Dixon.

Eddie pondered long over this and began to see that there *was* a difference between Dan and the others. Dan seemed to be always busy. No, that was not it—he *was* always busy. When he wasn't busy with his hands, he was busy with his brains—watching, asking, or studying how something might be done better than it was. And during the noon hour he no longer went to the restaurant. He carried his lunch with him and read while he ate.

Eddie had a brain of his own. His trouble was not laziness, but bad, or at least indifferent example. He had seen so many careless, lackadaisical people working about the various studios where he had been employed that he had come to suppose that such a disposition towards one's work was the natural one. So he had adopted it. But now he was beginning to think otherwise. He felt rather than saw that Dan, for all of his inexperience, was getting ahead of him, and he did not have to think hard to find the reason. As a consequence it was not long

before a marked improvement showed in his own work. And he was pleasantly surprised to find that he was beginning to like his job—an experience that had never happened to him before.

As for Dixon himself, each day brought new wonders and new joys. The days were much too short for him. The hours were like minutes, and he hardly noticed the flight of time after he reported in the morning until lunch-time. And then he enjoyed the quiet session with a book of some kind—always on some angle of the industry—which he borrowed from the property-room.

It was when he was finishing the book on photography one noon-time that a shadow fell across the page and remained there. Looking up he was startled to see MacQuarrie's dark eyes fixed on him with a peculiar look.

He wondered with a sense of panic if he had been so absorbed in reading that the lunch hour had expired without his noting its passage, and he rose to his feet in no little confusion.

MacQuarrie smiled at the young fellow's evident consternation. He, too, had begun to take notice of this earnest-looking boy, who really seemed to want to get somewhere, and after the passing days had led him to believe that his earnestness was sincere and abiding, and not a mere "flash in the pan" (as Meadows had prophesied of it), he began to grow interested.

For Douglas MacQuarrie was Kirk Kitson's right-hand man, and he knew of the tremendous

plans that Kitson was making for the future expansion of his organization. And he knew, too, just what was delaying the execution of those plans—lack of the right kind of men to handle the executive positions. For Kitson, although young in years—there are but few old or elderly men in the film industry; the industry itself is too young—was old in wisdom, and he realized the futility of building an organization on a foundation of incompetent executives. That is a type of foundation, he had humorously remarked more than once, in which reinforced concrete—in its slang sense—was not desired. And he had instructed his staff, of which MacQuarrie was a most valued member, to be constantly on the lookout for material that showed any kind of promise whatever.

MacQuarrie had not found much. Perhaps he was too exacting in his methods of developing talent. But talent that cannot stand the rubs is scarcely worth developing. And as he looked at the young man before him he wondered what kind of stuff he was made of. He noticed that he wasn't afraid to look a man full in the eye and he liked that sign.

"What are you reading?" he asked.

"Durfee's 'Elementary Handbook of Motion-Picture Photography,' sir," was the concise and detailed answer. Dan had recovered himself and was "on his toes." He had seen enough of MacQuarrie to know that the man wasted no time asking purposeless questions, and he wanted to make a good impression.

"I see. Going to be a camera-man, eh?" MacQuarrie was disappointed and was about to pass on. He had hoped that a moment's conversation with this boy would reveal some higher ambition.

"I hope not, sir."

"How's that?" The director's interest quickened at the other's answer. "Why do you hope not? A camera-man gets pretty good money, you know."

"Yes, but can he get any further? Hasn't he gone the limit in that direction?"

"Good!" thought MacQuarrie.

"Then why were you reading that book if you don't want to be a camera-man?"

"Because I want to get a good idea of the construction and operation of a motion-picture camera and to know what effects can be produced and how they are produced. And I want to know how to light a set."

MacQuarrie's impulse was to take this boy right away from his utility job and attach him to his own company. But this might not be politic. Attention of this kind from him might flatter the young fellow and give him a "swelled head," of which there were several severe cases in the studio right now—quite as many as he wanted. He would wait a day or two. He might have an opportunity to do it in a less personal way.

"But why under the sun do you want to know all those things if you're not going to be a camera-man?" he persisted.

"Doesn't a director have to know all those things, too, sir?" was the quick rejoinder.

MacQuarrie took a deep breath. But his well-schooled face registered nothing.

"What's your name?" he asked suddenly.

"Dan Dixon, sir."

MacQuarrie turned abruptly and without another word departed.

CHAPTER FIVE

HAMMERSON GOES LOCATION-HUNTING

HUGH HAMMERSON was treading on dangerous ground. He could not be said to be slipping, for that would imply that he had attained a position from which to slip. Which would be misleading. For he was assistant director to Douglas MacQuarrie in name only.

John B. Hammerson, Hugh's father, was a prosperous leather merchant—much too prosperous for his son's good. For Hugh, having always had everything that he wanted, never learned the appreciation of good fortune that they feel who have striven to attain it. And the elder Hammerson, having pampered him through his youth, found himself up against it when the time came to make his son of some use in the world.

He failed at everything he tried him at and finally, at Hugh's repeated urging, he sent him to Kirk Kitson, whom he had reason to number among his closest friends, and begged him to try his boy out in some capacity. Eager to favour a friend, Kitson had at once sent him to MacQuarrie with the request to make him his assistant.

“If he's anything like his father he'll be a win-

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ner. He's failed at everything else, but maybe its because he's never hit the right thing."

It took MacQuarrie just one hour to find out that his new assistant was nothing like his father. But lest he seem to be unfair, he kept him on for a while.

But after that first day he had been his own assistant, using Hammerson as a kind of errand-boy. He couldn't even be dignified with the title of "utility," for in MacQuarrie's estimation he had none. From time to time he had sent him out to hunt up locations, but regardless of the minuteness of the descriptions given him of the required type of location, Hammerson had never yet found one that was satisfactory.

And these failures were expensive. For MacQuarrie was about to begin a picture which he fully intended would surpass any of his previous efforts—one which he dreamed of as marking a new epoch in motion-picture history. It was his fond hope and ambition that "Flames of Conquest" would be the high-water mark of screen achievement. He had the story and he had the cast. And Kitson, whose hopes for the production were as great as his own, had given him unlimited financial support. And he did not intend to let any bungling location-finder interfere with his work by these unnecessary delays.

He knew that Hammerson was laying down on him at every turn, for he took twice as much time as should be required to hunt up a good location, to find the indifferent ones that he invariably reported.

But MacQuarrie did not object to the time he took, for he had long since reached the point where

the less he saw of his alleged assistant the better he liked it. But he disliked the idea of letting him get away with anything on him. And he made up his mind that the next time would be his last. He could become a studio hanger-on if he wanted, and collect a salary. But he could no longer represent himself as MacQuarrie's assistant if he failed to make good hereafter. Upon this point MacQuarrie was as adamant.

Hammerson, on the other hand, thought he was doing finely! He swaggered about the studio with an air of proprietorship that really did have its effect upon certain of the attachés, who were too ignorant to distinguish between stuff and bluff. To these he dropped many thinly veiled hints about his personal friendship with Kirk Kitson himself, and some of them seemed actually to believe that if MacQuarrie didn't watch his step pretty closely, Hugh would fire him and do his work himself! There are frequently people in the lower strata of great organizations who can be imposed upon in equally ridiculous ways.

One of Hammerson's particular friends was a youth named Joe Morrison, a little more than half-witted fat lad who had played small parts with various companies which called for some one of excessive fatness. Joe's poor half-developed brain had come to consider Hugh as of importance rivalling that of Kitson himself. And Hammerson, to nourish this absurd idea, told Joe confidentially that he was shortly going to form a company of his own, and that there was every chance that he would select

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Joe for leading man! From that time on, the fat fellow followed him like a leash dog and did his bidding in the slightest particular.

Why Hammerson should think that he was making good is beyond comprehension. Probably because he had not been discharged, he considered himself a valuable man to MacQuarrie; for he had lost so many positions that he had come to feel that he must be indispensable to any one who kept him more than a week. But he was under the impression, for all of that, that since MacQuarrie had engaged him on Kitson's request that he didn't dare discharge him. Which served only to make him the bolder in his indifference to his work.

MacQuarrie sent for him one morning early in the week, and when Hammerson reported to him he found his superior busily at work on the scenario of "Flames of Conquest."

"Don't sit down, Hammerson. You're not going to stay that long," began the director crisply as his so-called assistant started to make himself comfortable. "Here are the specifications for a location that I want you to hunt up. It is very important that we be working on that location not later than Friday noon. And it is equally important that we find the location exactly as specified on this sheet. Is that clear to you?"

"Sure," answered Hugh carelessly.

He took the blue sheet from MacQuarrie's hand and, without bothering to read it, folded it up and shoved it in his coat pocket.

"Now I don't care where the place is or how much it costs to get there—as long as it's right. Get going!"

Hammerson grinned broadly as he started out from the studio. This was the kind of a commission he liked. It was Tuesday morning and the company didn't need to be on the location until Friday noon. That meant, according to his code, that he could loaf a day and a half, return late Wednesday afternoon and sign his name to a big expense account.

The location? Oh, bother the location! If he happened to hear of a place that resembled the specifications, well and good—he'd report that to MacQuarrie as the location he had found. If he didn't—well, he'd just have to tell MacQuarrie that there was no such location to be found in the vicinity. By the way, what were the specifications? Come to think of it, he hadn't read them yet. And it wouldn't do any harm to have some kind of an idea of what old Mac wanted. Not a bad fellow, Mac, if you knew how to take him. Awful slave-driver, though.

He felt in his pocket for the blue sheet MacQuarrie had given him, but it was not there.

"Must have dropped it some place! Oh, well, what's the difference? Not worth while going back now. I'll dig up any old kind of a location and tell him he must have given me the wrong sheet."

He thought better of this idea after a moment's consideration, though, for he knew that MacQuarrie wasn't much given to doing things wrong, and that that excuse would never be accepted. Better tell him

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that he was unable to find a location with scenery that conformed to the specifications given.

So he dropped the matter from his mind and set out to enjoy his ill-gotten holiday.

After lunch that day Hank Meadows said to Dixon:

"Better hop up to stage number six. The director's assistant is away and they want some one to stand by to handle any little odd jobs that turn up."

Dan obeyed with alacrity. He couldn't have asked for an assignment that would have pleased him better. For stage number six, he knew, was where MacQuarrie was starting work on his big new production, and the more opportunity he had to watch MacQuarrie work the better he liked it.

As he walked rapidly up the studio he spied a folded sheet of blue paper lying on the floor not far from MacQuarrie's office. It did not look like a scrap that had been thrown away, so he picked it up and opened it. A few typewritten lines attracted his attention and he read:

"Specifications for location required for Fri., Aug. 6. High water-fall with log cabin on one bank at top of falls. Heavy fallen tree must lie half-way across falls from bank opposite cabin. Thick woods for background.

MacQuarrie."

It looked like a memorandum of some kind and although he didn't know whether it was of any value or not, he could do no harm by returning it to MacQuarrie, since it bore his signature.

When he came to stage six, MacQuarrie was talking with characteristic earnestness to a couple of his company. Dan stood respectfully at one side until he had finished and then, as he turned from the others, stepped up to the director.

"Mr. Meadows told me to report to you, sir," he said.

MacQuarrie's keen eyes caught the blue paper in Dan's hand.

"What's that paper?" he asked sharply.

"I found it on the floor near stage two, sir. It has your name on it, so I was going to give it to you."

The director opened it and when he saw that it was what he had expected, he frowned angrily.

"That blockhead Hammerson! Gone location-hunting without a copy of the specifications! Well, as thick as he is, he must have had sense enough to read them over, anyhow."

He looked at Dan for a second, and Dan returned the look eagerly. But MacQuarrie turned away. He had been on the verge of giving the paper back to the utility man and sending him off to see what he could do with it. But after all, he reflected, it would be time enough when Hammerson returned, if he failed on this assignment, too, as he half expected now that he would. So he turned his mind to other matters and Dan busied himself about the set as he saw things to be done.

The set was an elaborate one—by far the most pretentious that Dan had yet seen. It represented,

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with MacQuarrie's customary fidelity to detail, the richly furnished salon of a great ocean liner. Heavily upholstered leather chairs and sofas were strewn about promiscuously over the thickly carpeted floor, interspersed with an occasional heavy mahogany table upon which were laid, with studied carelessness, an abundance of books and magazines. Towards the further end were a number of card tables and some smaller, straight-backed chairs. In this set were to be enacted some of the scenes of "Flames of Conquest," and a far more travelled and critical eye than Dan's would have been compelled to call it a perfect representation.

The actors and actresses who were to work in this set were now emerging from their dressing-rooms, fully made up, and as he saw that the director had already started for the further end of the set, accompanied by Charlie Goldberg, his camera-man, Dixon hastened to follow so as to be present in case he was wanted.

This was the first real chance that Dan had had to watch a picture in the making, for he had hitherto been chased all over the studio in the execution of his duties and had seldom remained in the same spot for more than ten minutes at a time. And he was determined to make the most of this opportunity.

"We'll take this scene from about here, Charlie," MacQuarrie was saying. "Get your focus right away. It'll only be necessary to run through it two or three times before we shoot it."

He turned to Dan as Goldberg busied himself with his camera.

"Run down to that table at the end and bring me that bunch of papers. Don't drop any of them."

Then he turned to the electrician and gave him some instructions about the lighting.

When Dan came back and handed the director the sheaf of papers he saw that every chair that was within range of the camera, with one or two exceptions, was occupied. MacQuarrie was addressing himself to one of the actors, a short thickset man with a stubby black moustache, who had just entered the set through a door facing the camera.

"No, no, that isn't it, Bates! Not so fast. Remember, you're just sauntering about the boat casually, understand, and you drop in here indifferently. You came in that time as though you had a definite purpose. Just casually now—when you open the door look around a bit before you enter—not too much, or you'll see Stevens, and according to the script he sees you first, after you've sat down to read. Get the idea?"

Bates, who had listened attentively to every word, nodded.

"I think I've got it now all right."

"Good. Let's try it again. Positions!"

Bates stepped out of the set and closed the door behind him. The others in the scene resumed the occupations they were supposed to be engaged in. Some read newspapers or magazines, two or three engaged in low-toned conversation and one thin,

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sickly-looking man, rather nearer the camera than the others, nodded drowsily. Everything, with the exception of the scarcely audible conversation that was part of the action, was silent. Then the director started:

"Ready, Bates! Open the door—slowly, now. Hold it! Look about a bit . . . that's it. Register slight interest . . . look back over your shoulder. Enough—front! Enter now—slow, mind you! . . . cross to armchair . . . start to sit . . . that's right. Now cross to table . . . look them over. . . . Fine! . . . pick one up . . . turn the pages . . . take it. . . . Now to chair again . . . sit . . . start to read. Now you, Saunders!"—he was addressing the thin, drowsy man now. "Nod a little . . . now more . . . now more . . . now more . . . let the cigar fall from your mouth. . . . Quick! Wake up! That's it—pick it up . . . in the vest pocket for the matches now . . . look up . . . higher. Hold it! See Bates . . . look at him hard . . . rub your eyes—sleepy, you know . . . fine! Now register surprise . . . now recognition . . . great! Now up . . . cross over . . . Bates, look up! . . . surprise! . . . glad to see him . . . jump up to meet him . . . both hands; that's right. Shake 'em hard . . . pull over chair, Bates. . . . Now sit both, and talk . . . animation . . . laugh. . . . All right. That was better. We'll shoot it now."

The tension was relieved for a minute and the actors in the set relaxed from the positions they had

assumed and suspended whatever action they had been engaged in and rearranged some of their clothes, neckties, etc., or performed other like duties for themselves.

"Got your focus, Charlie?" asked MacQuarrie.

"Yes, sir."

"Lights ready, Sweeney?" he called.

"All ready," came the electrician's voice from the switchboard behind the set.

"All right—let's go! Positions!"

The tension was on again. Bates disappeared through the door, Saunders drowsed with the cigar in his mouth, and the low-toned conversation was resumed.

MacQuarrie gave every detail of arrangement, position, and action, one final scrutinizing glance and then, taking his stand to the left of the camera—

"Ready!" he barked crisply. "Lights! Action! Camera!"

The lights flickered and then flared steadily, and Goldberg began turning the camera crank.

"Ready, Bates! Enter—slow, remember. Hold it a minute . . . register slight interest . . . good! Look back over your shoulder . . ." and so on just as before until the scene was half enacted, when MacQuarrie unexpectedly called:

"Cut!"

The lights went out and Goldberg masked his lense with a tight-fitting metal cap.

Dan, from the position he had taken in back and to one side of the camera, where he had ravenously

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devoured every detail with his eyes, wondered what the matter could be. It had looked perfect to him. But the others merely showed interest. They were well used to these interruptions, it seemed.

MacQuarrie was looking at the feet of one of the actors.

"Jensen," he said, "you've got on high shoes. The night these scenes are supposed to take place you have to fall overboard right after leaving this salon. You kick off your shoes in the water and start to swim. You could never kick *those* shoes off in the water. And," he added with a smile, "you can't change them for low ones while you're falling. Better change now, don't you think? Don't bother going to your dressing-room—swap with somebody here that wears the same size. But keep the ones you get, for you'll have to wear them in every scene from now on."

The change was quickly effected and they were ready to begin again.

"Ready! Lights! Action! Camera!"

And they were at it again—camera grinding to the accompaniment of MacQuarrie's staccato directions. Bates made his entrance, crossed to his chair, started for the table and was selecting his magazine when again—

"Cut!"

And the lights went out and the click of the camera ceased for the second time.

"Cameron," said MacQuarrie, addressing a grouchy-looking little man with beetling eyebrows,

whose position had been on a sofa near the door through which Bates had been effecting his entrance, "I'm going to put a bit in there for you. As soon as Bates opens that door, you wrinkle your nose and sneeze. Get it? Then glare at Bates and the open door. The longer Bates stands there holding that door open on you, the madder you get. Bates, you prolong it by taking out your handkerchief and wiping your eyeglasses. That's a natural move, anyway, because you've just been on deck and the salt spray has settled on them. Then when you walk over to the chair forget to close the door. Cameron, you keep on glaring at him until he reaches his chair. Then give a sudden sneeze, throw down your paper, get up and slam the door. Then give Bates one more look, sit down disgustedly and pick up your paper again. Catch the idea?"

"I think so."

"All right. Let's try it. Don't shoot this time, Charlie. Positions! Ready! Action!"

And so it was—start and stop—start and stop. MacQuarrie had the reputation of using up more raw film in the photographing of a single scene than any other director in the studio—if not in the entire industry. For no matter how far along a scene had progressed, if he saw the slightest chance of improving it by correcting some nearly negligible detail, or by the introduction of some suddenly thought of bit of business that would lend a more human touch to the story or scene, at once his voice would ring out with "Cut!"

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But this it was—this quality of persistent “never-let-up-until-it’s-right” type of effort that had elevated him to the pinnacle which he occupied among directors. And Dixon felt, as he studied him, that it was a liberal education to watch him for just one afternoon. Dan’s own duties were light just now. Occasionally MacQuarrie tossed him something to hold, or ordered him to move some of the furniture in the set a trifle. Nobody else disturbed him, for he seemed to be considered, for the time being, as the director’s private property.

For a while there was a lull in the proceedings. MacQuarrie had come to a scene of rather extraordinary length and he had gathered around him all those who were to appear in it, and, seeing that they were comfortably seated, began a thorough explanation of what was expected of each one.

Dan felt that he was filling up space that could be better occupied by some one else, so he slipped away from that particular corner. He was wondering how best to pass the time when an unfamiliar voice, one with a hearty, wholesome ring that he couldn’t help but like, accosted him.

“Have you had any trouble with your friend lately?”

The speaker was a tall, square-shouldered man in evening dress, whose Van Dyke beard and stately carriage lent him a decided air of distinction. Only the cheerful blue eyes were familiar, and Dan wrinkled his brow as he tried to recall where he had seen them before.

The other smiled at his doubt and then he remembered. But it was hard to believe that this elderly-looking man, who appeared to be nothing less than a distinguished ambassador to some foreign court, could be that husky, athletic young chap in the gym suit that had smiled at him and made faces at Hugh Hammerson the day when that individual had attempted to bully him by the gymnasium set!

And yet they were one and the same. The difference of dress alone would not have been deceiving, but those few bits of crêpe hair so carefully arranged into a beard that looked as though it grew there; those lines about the eyes and the different way of combing the hair lent an entirely different appearance to the face. Its size, shape, and expression were completely altered, and Dan was not even yet quite sure of himself.

"Yes, you're right," laughed the hearty voice. "I'm the same fellow."

"Well, I'd never guess it," said Dan, smiling back.

"You're not supposed to," was the good-natured rejoinder. "But you haven't answered my question. Has Hammerson bothered you any since that day you turned the laugh on him?"

"Not unless you would call surly looks a bother. They don't bother me any."

The other looked appraisingly at Dan's well-developed chest and shoulders, and then he said, approvingly:

"No, I shouldn't think they would. It should,

take more than black looks to disturb you. You box, don't you?"

"A little," answered Dan modestly.

"Honest?" His companion was eager now. "Say! I've got some gloves in my dressing-room, and I've been looking for weeks for some one to box with. Will you put them on with me some time?"

There was a boyish enthusiasm about him that struck a responsive chord in Dan's own bosom, and he promptly accepted the invitation. It was agreed that they would meet at the studio a half-hour before work began the following morning, to stage their first little bout.

Hal Curtis, as Dan had heard him called, was delighted to find a "sparring partner" at last. But he secretly hoped that he would prove to be much more than a sparring partner. For, strange as it may seem, Hal was lonesome. He had been out of college but a few months and had not found many friends. This was in a sense his own fault, for his good looks, coupled with the popularity that his screen effigy was fast winning for him throughout the country, had made him much sought-for socially.

But he did not care for that kind of society. His idea of a friend and companion was such as he had had in his college days—fellows who would hike with you, fence with you, wrestle with you, race with you, or box with you. And he wanted such a one the worst way.

He had noticed Dan several times since his encounter with Hammerson and had sized him up

pretty accurately. The very few years difference in their ages and the vast difference in their positions meant nothing to Hal Curtis. He was seeking friendship, and he cared not where he found it if it could qualify.

"Are you working in Mr. MacQuarrie's company?" asked Dixon, as the other seemed inclined towards friendly conversation.

"Yes, but I don't think he'll use me today. I work in some of the earlier scenes, and they won't be taken until later, you know."

This sounded strange to Dan, and he wondered what it meant.

"I don't understand. How can scenes that are earlier than the ones he is taking be taken later? Won't that mix things up pretty well?"

"Oh no," laughed Curtis. "You see, scenes are hardly ever photographed in the order in which they appear on the screen. That would be a tremendous job, and besides, it's all unnecessary. For example, take the scene that they just finished there in the salon set. According to the scenario and the way it will appear on the screen, those two men leave the salon, go up on deck and meet another man. Then the scene returns to the salon and shows the older man's son looking for him there. Now if they took it in that order they'd have to go over to the harbour after making the scene they just finished, take the scene on the deck and come back here to get the next scene in the salon set. Then they'd probably have to knock this set down and build a hotel lobby set

for a scene, then strike that set and put this one up again for a scene—or else have one stage riding idle all the time—and then, perhaps, go over to the harbour for another scene. That would be a pretty good job, wouldn't it?"

"Whew! I should say so! I never thought of it like that. But how do they get around it?"

"Well, they know before they begin just what they want. They know just what scenes are going to be taken in the salon set, just how many in the hotel lobby set and so on all the way through. Then they'll take all the scenes in the salon together, one after the other, and then, perhaps, go out and take the deck scenes while the lobby set is being built. Get the idea?"

"Yes, but how can they tell which is which if they are not in order? I should think they'd be all twisted every which way. But then, I suppose that the first salon scene that is to appear in the picture is the first one they take and then they take all the other salon scenes in the order of their appearance. That's it, isn't it?"

"No," smiled Curtis, "not at all." It seemed good to him to talk with some one who was so persistent about getting at the truth, and he enjoyed telling him what he knew. "They pay no attention to order at all. Sometimes the first scene to appear is the last to be taken."

Dan shook his head in mystification.

"But why in the world should they do a thing like that?" he demanded.

"There are a number of reasons," Hal replied. "For instance, there may be several actors who are borrowed from some other stage and are due to work with their own company as soon as they are through. The scenes in which they are used are taken first. Or, maybe, there are several scenes widely separated in point of time and action but occurring on the same location, in which seventy-five or a hundred extra people are used. The sooner these scenes can be gotten out of the way the cheaper it will be, for the sooner the extras can be let go. And they are paid by the day, you know. Or, take another example of two emotional scenes separated by a number of light comedy bits. It's much easier for the actors and better results can be obtained by doing the emotional scenes at the same time rather than going from heavy emotion to light comedy and back again. Do you get the idea now?"

Dan's brow had begun to clear during the explanation, and now he drew a deep breath.

"Whew! Gee, but isn't there a lot to it? It's great, though, isn't it? But," as his previous question recurred to him, "you haven't told me yet how they know which is which after they take them if they mix them up so. I think," he added apologetically, "that that will straighten it all out for me, and I won't ask you any more questions. It's great of you to tell me so much, though. Do you mind?"

"I should say not," declared the actor heartily. "You fire all the questions you want at me and I'll try and answer them all. Now about getting

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the scenes arranged in order and knowing 'which is which,' as you put it. Do you remember holding a slate with a number on it in front of the camera for Charlie Goldberg after a scene had been taken a little while ago?"

"Yes, and I've been wondering ever since what it was for. I did it every time that Mr. MacQuarrie said 'Cut!' whether the scene was finished or not. And it seemed as though Charlie took a picture of it. Did he?"

"That's just what he did. And that number was the number of the scene as it is numbered in the scenario. So when the film is developed there will be a picture at the end of each scene telling just where it belongs. Then when the whole production is done each scene is cut from the others and they are all reassembled according to their numbers."

Dan's face brightened.

"I see! And sometimes when the slate had the letters 'N. G.' on it instead of a number, it meant that the scene was no good and could be thrown out, didn't it?"

"Right you are! But they're getting ready to rehearse a scene now, and you'd better keep close to MacQuarrie. And say!" he called after him as Dan started off, "don't forget tomorrow morning, will you?"

"You bet I won't!" promised Dan over his shoulder.

CHAPTER SIX

ON HIS TOES

AS early as Dan arrived at the studio the next morning, MacQuarrie was there earlier. Dan could not remember ever having seen the director arrive in the morning or leave at night, so many hours did he give to his work.

"What can he find to do so early in the morning?" he asked Hal Curtis, whom he had met outside and to whose dressing-room they were now proceeding.

"He's probably been in the projection-room having the operator run off the scenes that were taken yesterday. They usually develop and dry them during the night. But here we are—come in."

It was a big room, one wall of which supported many hooks, from which hung clothes of all descriptions. A mirror and make-up shelf graced part of the opposite wall. But were it not for these items, it might easily be mistaken for a college student's quarters. Pennants and banners of the different colleges, crossed fencing foils, hockey sticks and bats and various other bits of athletic equipment decorated the walls; a bag of golf sticks leaned against a corner and a heavy spring exerciser hung from a stout hook fixed in the wall. A wash-stand occupied another corner, and Dan correctly surmised that the

canvas curtain that formed a diagonal partition at the far end of the room concealed a shower bath.

"What do you think of it?" smiled the actor, as Dan surveyed the room in surprise.

"Why, its great, isn't it?"

"I like it pretty well," remarked Hal with a touch of boyish pride. He tossed Dan a pair of trunks, a jersey and some rubber-soled canvas shoes, and they got into their "ring togs," as Hal dubbed them. Then, helping each other to adjust their gloves, they went at it at once.

If Curtis had expected to find his opponent a novice he soon had reason to change his mind. Dixon had all of the strength, speed, and endurance of the other fellow, and what he lacked in weight, reach, and the slight inferiority of his science, he made up for by his agile foot-work and his ability to take punishment.

Hal beamed happily as they splashed about under the cold shower after the bout. It seemed that a void in his life had been filled, and he felt that his lonesomeness was destined to be a thing of the past. But then, he sighed as he recalled that most of the scenes of "Flames of Conquest" were to be taken at the West Coast studios, and he would probably be leaving the East within a fortnight. And who could tell what would become of Dan in the weeks—perhaps months—that would elapse before his return?

"Gee, Dan," he said boyishly, after they had taken a brisk rubdown and were dressing, "I wish you were coming to the coast with us."

"The coast? What do you mean?"

This was the first that Dan had heard that pictures were made elsewhere. To tell the truth, he had never given that matter any thought, and if he had he would have probably decided that there were enough pictures being made in the Kitson studios alone to supply the demand.

"Why, MacQuarrie is taking 'Flames of Conquest' company to the Los Angeles headquarters after we get through making some of the interiors and one or two exteriors here in the East. And I certainly wish you were coming with us."

Dan wished so too, but as he didn't see much possibility of having his wish granted, he didn't waste much time in wishing.

His duties that day were the same as they had been the day before, and he learned much by watching MacQuarrie and questioning Hal Curtis.

About four-thirty in the afternoon, as he was holding an "N. G." slate up before the camera, he saw Hammerson approaching the set. MacQuarrie saw him too, and seemed to wait for him.

"Did you find that location?" he demanded, without waiting for his assistant to speak.

Hammerson tried to avoid meeting the director's eyes. He looked guilty.

"No, sir."

"Where'd you look?"

"Why—all around."

The slate had been photographed, so Dan stepped over towards MacQuarrie to await further orders.

But the director didn't see him. He was looking straight at Hammerson with the suspicion of a sneer on his face.

"What kind of a location did I send you for, Hammerson? Do you know?"

Hugh looked up at him as he asked the question and tried to bluff it.

"Why, of course I know," he blustered. "What do you think I am?"

"You ought to know by this time. I've told you often enough."

MacQuarrie was not in a pleasant mood, and he didn't intend to take any "lip" from this embodiment of incompetency. He knew now that Hammerson had lost the specification sheet without looking at it, and that he had deliberately loafed his time away without making the slightest effort to accomplish the purpose for which he had been sent.

"What kind of a location was it?"

Hammerson was stumped, and he knew it. He would have liked to have bluffed it through, but he didn't know how.

"I—I—don't know," he mumbled, fumbling through his pockets. "I—I—I guess I must have mislaid—"

"You don't know, eh? And I suppose you've just found out that you didn't know. What have you been doing since yesterday morning?" demanded MacQuarrie.

"I—I was taken awful sick—all of a sudden—honest, Mr. MacQuarrie—right after I left you—"

and—and—and—” his voice trailed off into a miserable silence before the burning contempt of those flashing black eyes.

“Sick! You look it!”

MacQuarrie looked steadily at the hulking frame for another moment, and then, with mock despair, he raised his eyes heavenward.

“O Lord!” he said fervently, “please send me a man with a brain!”

Some uncontrollable impulse governed Dan Dixon for the next few minutes. He never was able, in his after life, to explain the timidity with which he behaved. But as he heard MacQuarrie’s prayer his lips puckered themselves to whistle, and almost without effort he found himself trilling lightly the first few notes of the famous song, “I Hear You Calling Me!”

As the musical sound broke the silence that had fallen over the set, MacQuarrie turned slowly and looked full at Dixon, as if wondering if the boy had intended to attach any significance to his song.

Dan met his eye with a look of calm assurance. He couldn’t tell how he did it, for his heart was thumping like a triphammer at his own audacity.

“Were you paging me, Mr. MacQuarrie?” he asked innocently.

The easy-going style of question appealed to the director. This boy could look him in the eye and talk to him like a man.

“Have you got a brain?” he asked bluntly.

“Yes, sir!” Dan answered promptly. It was do

or die now, he felt, and he wasn't going to hide his light under a bushel.

"Do you know how to use it?" was the next question.

"Yes, sir!"

"You do, eh?" MacQuarrie, without moving his eyes from Dan, stroked his chin thoughtfully for a few seconds, and Dan, with a tremor of doubt, began to wonder if he had been too "fresh" after all!

Perhaps the director resented the idea of a utility boy thus forcing attention upon himself. The thought occurred to him that, instead of helping himself by offering to jump into the breach that Hammerson's delinquency had caused, he might have injured himself irrevocably. Could he be discharged for such a trivial offence, he wondered?

"Well,"—MacQuarrie opened his mouth at last—"We'll see just what kind of a brain it is, and what kind of use you can make of it!"

Dan opened his mouth—and shut it without saying a word. He was too surprised and excited to trust himself to speech.

The director drew out of his pocket the same blue specification sheet that Dan had found the day before. When Hammerson saw it and recognized the significance of the fact that MacQuarrie had it in his possession, his jaw dropped. MacQuarrie handed the sheet to Dan.

"Here," he said. "I want a location that corresponds to this description *in every detail, and I don't*

care what it costs to get it! And we've got to start work there not later than Friday noon. Do you understand?"

Dan took the paper, opened it, and read it before he replied. As he did this, MacQuarrie turned and shot a significant look at Hammerson. The big fellow lowered his eyes and slunk out of sight behind the set.

"I understand, sir," Dan said when he had finished reading.

"Good! Now get going!"

Dan tried to walk, but it was hard work. His legs wanted to run and his heart felt like flying. For now, he felt, he had a real chance to show what he was worth. Perhaps MacQuarrie doubted that he had a brain. Well, he'd show him, he determined with set teeth.

But as he left the studio behind he began to wonder if, after all, he had been wise to risk his all on this one chance. For if he failed, he would have hard work convincing MacQuarrie at any future time that he should have another chance to prove his mettle.

For although he felt that here was his opportunity to show his superior that he was capable of handling a more responsible job than that of utility boy, still it was not as though Opportunity had knocked at his door. No—he had taken the initiative. He had knocked at Opportunity's door!

He had practically challenged MacQuarrie to give him a chance to show what he could do. And

the director, in accepting the challenge, seemed to dare him to make good.

He set his jaw with the firmness of determination. *He'd take the dare, and he'd deliver the goods.* He would do what he was sent to do and he'd play Mac-Quarrie's own game—*he wouldn't let up until it was done right!*

With his mind definitely fixed on this one purpose and excluding every thought that did not bear directly on it, he composed himself for constructive thought. He took the specification sheet from his pocket and, reading it over again, closed his eyes until he could visualize the location he was seeking.

It would be no easy job to find it, he decided. He knew New Jersey well enough to know that no place in that state would correspond with the requirements. But outside of the state he had never been, and, to save his life, he had no idea where to strike.

It was nearing his supper-time now, and he supposed that he would, if he felt so inclined, be privileged to wait until the morning before beginning his search. But no—that would not be bringing him any nearer the goal of achievement. He would start that evening—at once!

He decided, upon consideration, that he had better go to his room, wash up and put on his best clothes. For he had some travelling ahead of him, and, when he found the location (Dan had the habit of always saying "when," not "if"), he might have to negotiate with the owner for permission to have the company trespass on it. And he

would receive far more consideration, he knew, if he were well-dressed than if he wore his working-clothes.

The clear cold water on his face seemed to stimulate his brain, and as he bathed and changed his clothes he began to reason logically. He had not travelled outside his native state and that, naturally, was the reason why he was unfamiliar with the scenery of other places. It followed, necessarily, that those who had travelled would be more apt to know than he. But here he was up against it again. Where could he find one who had travelled enough in the rural sections of the country to be able to tell him what he wanted? Not MacQuarrie, surely. For although he must have travelled extensively he couldn't know where the required location was to be found, else he would not have sent a location-finder to look for it. Dan began to wonder more than ever if he hadn't bitten off more than he could chew.

But he dismissed this thought—it wasn't progressive. He picked up his line of reasoning again and began to reason backwards. What practical use could such a location have? Water-power? Yes—but that would probably mean a water-wheel, or a power-house, or some other undesirable object just in the wrong place. It would be a good angle to work from, though, if he couldn't find any other.

What else? Fish, perhaps? Ah—there was a thought. Wasn't there a Fish and Game Commission in some states, or perhaps all of them? It seemed that they should be familiar with all the

water in their respective states. But they couldn't be reached until morning, he supposed. And he just *couldn't* wait that long for action.

Wasn't there some other way? There must be! Dan was fully dressed now and he paced up and down the room like a prisoner longing for freedom.

Supposing, he asked himself, he were going on a vacation and knew the kind of a place he wanted to go to, but didn't know where there was such a place? How would he find out? How did "Chug" Wheeler's father find that dandy little lake that "Chug" had told him—he knew!

He slapped his straw hat on his head and tore down stairs, out of the house, and down the street on the run. People stared at him as he dashed wildly by, and quite sensibly stepped aside to let him pass. For that next ferry was not going to cross to New York without Dan!

Dan's heart was thumping rapidly. And not from physical exertion, either, for he was too well-conditioned for that. But its action quickened at the knowledge that now he was on the right track and if he didn't find the location, it would be because it didn't exist. For was there a place on the face of the earth that a Tourists' Agency couldn't direct you to?

Arriving on the New York side, Dixon was the first to jump from the bow of the ferry to the wharf. He threaded his way through the loiterers, and entering the first drug-store he saw, consulted a directory. He copied the address of a famous

agency in his notebook and boarded a downtown car.

As the car snailed its way along through the traffic he prayed fervently that the office he was bound for wouldn't be closed for the day. It was late, he knew, and he had no idea what hours such establishments observed. But he didn't intend to overlook a single possibility.

Fortune favoured him, for this was the season of the year when Tourists' Agencies were busy arranging southern trips for the fall and winter months, and a staff of attendants was usually on hand until nine or ten o'clock in the evening at this particular office.

As Dan entered and advanced towards the railing that confined the row of desks, he was approached by a smooth-looking young man with tortoise-shell glasses and a barely perceptible blond moustache, who politely inquired if there was anything he could do for him.

"I hope there is," said Dan earnestly. "I want to go where there's a waterfall."

"Ah, yes," nodded the attendant knowingly. "Something like Niagara, for instance."

"Yes, something like it, but not quite so big," Dan replied.

"I see. Something a little quieter, perhaps." He smiled knowingly. "Honeymoon, I presume?"

"Er—hardly," grinned Dan, a trifle disconcerted, but encouraged by the fact that he was beginning to be taken for a man instead of a boy.

He decided that the best way to get satisfactory

results was to tell this fellow just exactly what he wanted and why he wanted it. Then there could be no misunderstanding.

The attendant listened interestedly to every word Dan had to say.

"So you're a moving-picture man, are you?" he asked when Dan had finished. "That's a great business, isn't it? I wish I could get in it. I guess I'd better let you talk with Mr. Oliver. He knows more about those things than I do."

He opened the gate for Dan to pass through, and after asking his name, escorted him to a flat glass-topped desk, at which sat an energetic-looking little man with a bald head, and introducing him as Mr. Oliver, the manager of the office, left Dan with him.

"Take a chair, Mr. Dixon, and tell me what I can do for you."

Dan repeated his story and described the kind of location he was seeking. Mr. Oliver became thoughtful after he finished speaking. He opened his mouth once, and then, as if thinking better of what he had been about to say, shook his head slowly and tapped the top of the desk with a pen.

"No," he said at last, "I'm afraid I can't help you out. I don't know of any place hereabouts that quite fills the bill."

Dan's heart began to sink. If this man didn't know, no one would. Well, anyway, he hadn't failed through his own fault. MacQuarrie would have to admit that he had tried, which was more than Hammerson had done on the same assignment.

But it was poor consolation to know that he had done more than one who had done nothing at all; and at that, he hadn't accomplished any more. But Mr. Oliver was speaking again. "Of course, there's the Haunted Hut on Manitou Falls. That would be just about what you want. But it hasn't got the fallen tree, and besides, it's much too far. It would be out of the question."

Dan leaned forward with a jerk. He grasped at the idea like a drowning man at the proverbial straw.

"Where is that?" he demanded.

"Why, it's much too far away for your purpose, Mr. Dixon. It's away up-state, about a hundred and sixty-mile trip, when you consider the round-about way you'd have to go. And I guess you wouldn't want to take your company that far, would you?" he smiled.

"I guess we would!" answered Dan promptly. "Our company is going to start for the Pacific coast in about two weeks to take some scenes for the same picture that we want this waterfall for, Mr. Oliver, so I guess a matter of a hundred and sixty miles won't stop us. Tell me about this haunted hut and Manitou Falls that you mentioned, please."

Mr. Oliver's attitude changed at this speech. He had been courteous and obliging before, but at Dan's words he thought to himself that an organization that could afford to do business on such a scale as his young visitor hinted was worthy of recognition, and that this young man who represented them and

who seemed to know just what he wanted (and was so evidently determined to get it), was entitled to all the assistance he was empowered to give. So he, too, sat up, and by the time their little conference was at an end, Dan, who had taken out his notebook and pencil and jotted down everything of importance that the office-manager told him, was in full possession of all the facts concerning Manitou Falls and the various ways of reaching the spot.

These falls, according to Mr. Oliver, who produced maps and time-tables to check up his own statements, were eight miles north of the village of East Quimby, which was a hundred and fifty miles by rail from New York City, and to which but two trains ran daily.

The falls were reached by stage, which met the noon train and transported the passengers over a hazardous route to Mount Manitou, on the crest of which reposed a secluded and rather exclusive health resort, and down whose side courses the Little Rocky River. The Little Rocky, according to Oliver, was a small, swift-rushing stream which tore its way through rocky cañons and wooded glens until, curving about through the wildest and most picturesque section of the country, it slowed its pace a bit before cascading in spectacular beauty through a fall of thirty feet to resume its tempestuous career on the rocks below.

"It offers one of the most splendid bits of natural scenery that I know of," declared Mr. Oliver, warming up to his subject as memory recalled to his

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mind's eye the exquisite beauties of the place. "And the only thing that prevents it from becoming popularized is its difficulty of access. And if you do not mind carrying your company so far, Mr. Dixon, I'm sure you will be amply repaid."

Dan could not help feeling important as Mr. Oliver referred to "his company" and seemed to assume that he was in complete charge of their operations, and it was too good to spoil. What would Mr. Oliver think, he wondered, if he only knew that he had been talking to a mere utility boy? However, he tried not to show the pride he felt in at last having something to do that required initiative, and he succeeded very well indeed.

He thanked the office-manager heartily for the assistance he had rendered and asked him what the charges would be. He was agreeably surprised when Mr. Oliver told him not to mention it—that it had been a pleasure to serve Mr. Dixon. He escorted Dan to the door and shook hands with him.

"If you really do want to do something for me, Mr. Dixon, I would appreciate it very much if you could conveniently arrange to have your company's transportation purchased through our office. It wouldn't cost you a cent more, and it would help us out considerably."

Dan thought the idea a good one and he promised the other that, while he had nothing to do with that end himself, he would earnestly recommend the idea. And why not? thought Dan. These were people who could be of great assistance—already had been, in

fact. And he saw no reason why they should not be encouraged. He resolved to mention it to Mr. MacQuarrie on his return.

He glanced at his watch as he rode down in the elevator and was surprised to see that it was already a quarter to ten. There was a train for East Quimby, so Mr. Oliver had said, at ten-thirty, and one at six o'clock in the morning. Dan had his mind made up—the ten-thirty was the only train that interested him.

A police officer at Times Square directed him to the subway as the best means of getting to the Grand Central Terminal, and he was soon shooting underground in the shuttle-train for the station.

After purchasing his ticket and finding the track upon which his train would be made up, he still had time for a glass of milk and a sandwich, and then—back to his train.

As the conductor's long drawn-out "All abo-o-o-oard!" rang out on the platform, Dan gave way to a sense of elation.

He was on his way—and he was "on his toes!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

BLACK BRIAN TAKES A HAND

DAN made himself comfortable in one of the forward coaches, and as soon as he was settled, began to study the time-table which he had obtained at the station. He found that the train was not due to arrive at East Quimby until half-past three in the morning, so he decided that the best thing for him to do was to get a few hours of sleep.

Shading his eyes from the lights with his hat, he permitted himself to relax in every muscle. The activity of the evening, coupled with the performance of his duties at the studio during the day, had tired him, and it did not take him long to accustom himself to the clatter of the wheels and sink into a more or less sound sleep.

Although awakened several times by the raucous voice of the brakeman announcing the several stations at which the train stopped, he scarcely noticed the flight of time and was agreeably surprised when he heard the same voice cry out:

“Station’s East Quimby! East Quimby!”

He pushed back his hat, straightened himself in his clothes and stepped out on the little East Quimby station platform.

It was that darkest hour that just precedes the

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awn. The stars had blinked themselves out and the moon itself had faded and disappeared among the hills.

Dan tried to pierce the inky blackness that engulfed him as the train slowly steamed away. But the attempt was a failure in all directions but one—where the beams of a lantern showed him a lank, overalled individual, evidently the express or freight agent (both, he found out later, and station master as well as ticket-agent in the bargain), struggling with a heavy trunk which he was vainly trying to balance on a small hand-truck.

“Let me give you a lift with that,” said Dan, advancing out of the darkness into the little circle of flickering light.

The agent whirled as though startled at the sound of the voice, and as he saw Dan his thin be-whiskered jaw dropped and he peered at him over the rim of his steel-bowed spectacles.

“Tarnation! Whar’d yew drap from?” he demanded.

“The train, of course. Where else?” laughed Dan.

“Wal, whut’d yew do thet fer?” was asked severely, as though he had offended some tenet of the other’s code.

“Why, is it against the rules?” he questioned.

“Wal, no. Dunno’s thar’s any rule ag’in it. But ‘tain’t bein’ done much.”

“No?”

“No siree! Let’s see, now”—he scratched his

chin a moment, which operation was evidently supposed to be indicative of deep thought—"Yep! Yew're th' fust pusson to drap off'n th' three-thutty train sence three years come next March. Thet wuz th' night th' Little Rocky swelled up fit t' bust, an' washed th' bridge away up th' line a piece. They all had t' git out then," he cackled, apparently enjoying what must have been considered a good joke on the passengers. "Folks don't usually git off th' three-thutty here if they kin help it. But yew ain't told me yet why *yew* got off. Why was it?" he demanded, all serious again, as though no one might come in his domain without giving full and free account of himself. He had forgotten the trunk and the truck by this time, and, hands on hips, devoted his whole attention to extracting all the information Dan would give him.

"Why, I'm on my way to the Haunted Hut by Manitou Falls. Can you direct me there?"

"Th' Ha'nted Hut!" Down went the jaw again. "Great jumpin' Jehosaphat! What in tarnation do yew want at th' Ha'nted Hut? An' at this time o' th' mornin', too?"

Dan knew that he could easily spend the rest of the day there answering this inquisitive fellow's questions without accomplishing a thing. So he decided to cut him short at once. But it must be done without giving offence, for this was the only person in sight, and he must find out from him which road to take. So he merely said:

"I represent some one who may want to rent the

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place, and he has sent me up to look at it. Can you tell me how to get there?"

But if he hoped to assuage the other's curiosity with this remark he was vastly mistaken, for it seemed to give greater impetus to his questioning.

"Snakes! Who in thunderation wants t' rent the Ha'nted Hut? An' what's he goin' t' rent it fer? Goin' t' live thar, is he? Hev t' make a powerful sight of improvements ef he is. An' he won't stay long at thet, ef he sees one o' th' ha'nts! I hain't never saw none m'se'f, but I guess they be thar, all right. When's he goin' t' move in?"

The rapidity with which his interlocutor arrived at conclusions amused Dan, but as he was anxious to be about his business he only said:

"He hasn't made up his mind whether to rent it or not yet. I'm going to decide for him when I see the place. Is it far?"

"Wal, 'tis an' 'tain't. It's about three miles an' a half as th' crow flies, but I cal'late yew'll prob'ly want to use th' road. Putty good, eh?" And he snickered appreciatively at his own witticism. "Did ye laugh at thet? I can't see very well in th' dark."

Dan assured him that he had laughed heartily, and the native continued:

"Wal, yew jes' take this here road, an' foller it like a dog does a cat, 'round corners, 'n' ever'thin'. Yew can't miss th' Falls when yew come to 'em. Yew kin hear 'em 'way off. An' th' hut's right 'longside. It's about eight miles by road. Stage-

coach leaves at 'leven-thutty. Can't yew wait? I drive it m'se'f."

"I'm afraid I wouldn't have time."

And, thanking East Quimby's only wakeful citizen, Dan took himself off up the appointed road.

The baggage master watched until the darkness had reclaimed the stranger, and then he sat down suddenly upon the forgotten trunk and mopped his brow with a great bandanna handkerchief.

"Whoosh!" he exclaimed. "Ain't thet th' limit ef ever thar wuz one? Goin' t' rent th' Ha'nted Hut! Must be one o' them scientific fellers thet talks with spooks. Thet's jes' what it is! Cracky! I'll bet he's got a Weejee Board, too! I must make his acquaintance."

And he made haste to dispose of the trunk in order to lose no time in spreading the news to the populace which, in answer to the strident summons of many roosters, would soon begin to make its early appearance. And the rumours that spread about East Quimby that day were worth hearing.

Dan started off slowly at first, but as his eyes accustomed themselves to the darkness and he was able to distinguish the general outline of the woods that hemmed in the road on both sides, he began to let himself out, and he was soon striding along at his regular pace. But as the road began to incline into an appreciable up-grade after he had proceeded about half a mile, he was forced to slow up a little. However, he lost no more time than was absolutely necessary.

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The darkness was slowly lifting now, and the narrow strip of sky over the road, which was the only part not masked by the tall pines, paled to an indifferent grey. A cool breeze sprang up, and, whispering softly through the fragrant foliage, gently awakened the birds, who chirped drowsily a bit before setting off in quest of breakfast.

The fresh morning air tasted good to Dan after his night in the stuffy coach, and he inhaled deep lungfuls of the stimulating tonic with a full sense of appreciation and gratitude. For he had been raised close to nature, and he seemed to feel bound by the ties of kinship, respect, and devotion to this untrammelled Rendezvous of the Winds.

Soon the strip of sky assumed the livelier, warmer hues that heralded the coming of the sun, and as Dan reached a little clearing at the top of a steep hill, he paused and looked about.

The red disc of the sun was pushing its edge above the crest of the eastern hills, bringing a glow of ruddy health to the cheeks of the heavens and illuminating the scene before him with a delicate rose which, blending down into the deep green of the forest shadows, presented a vision of rare and spectacular beauty.

Ahead of him, winding downward now for a space, was the road, which had gradually become nothing but a pair of wagon-tracks with weed-grown ridges between. And from the edge of the little clearing even to the horizon, were trees—nothing but trees, whose leafy boughs now seemed alive with

the cheerful chirps of the feathered folk. As an accompaniment to their morning song could be heard from afar the vague roar of Manitou Falls.

Dan gazed at the splendid picture that nature's lavish brush had painted, and, spurred by the desire to see the Falls before this wonder-light had faded into the sharp glare of full day, he hastened on.

Coming suddenly to a turn in the road he knew by the increased volume of the noise, in which could now be definitely distinguished the loud splash of the waters, that his destination was close at hand, and, turning off into the woods, he followed whither his ears led him.

Squirrels chattered boldly at him from low-hung branches, and birds carolled gaily from safer heights, while the buzzing hum of insect life filled the leafy shrubbery. And with it all, that wonderful, indescribable, most exhilarating of all odours, the smell of the woods!

He had caught, some minutes before, the glint of sunlight on water, and now he stepped suddenly into the clear. There, tumbling down before him to crash into a feathery spray on the rocks below, were the Manitou Falls—just as Mr. Oliver had described them, and, as Dan now knew, just as Mr. MacQuarrie wanted them. For upon the south bank, upon which he stood, and scarcely a dozen yards from him, was a cabin of weather-beaten logs.

There was one item wanting—the fallen tree which should reach over the falls from the north.

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bank. But Dan knew how that could be remedied. He saw the very tree on the opposite side of the stream, which, if properly felled, would land in exactly the desired position.

He walked a distance upstream where the current was weaker, and, quickly stripping himself, waded out up to his neck. Then, having made a flat bundle of his shirt and trousers, he balanced them on his head and a few swift, strong strokes brought him to the other side.

With his knife he blazed the tree of his selection at the point where the axe should cleave it. And then, with a flat, sharp-edged stone, he dug an unmistakable furrow from the foot of the tree for a rod in the direction in which he intended it should fall.

This done, he recrossed the stream, and exercised vigorously, both to expedite the drying process and to warm himself after his invigourating plunge in the icy waters.

Out of curiosity he took a look into the deserted cabin, but found nothing to interest him there. A broken table, a dilapidated chair, and a bundle of rags in the corner, completed the inventory of its contents.

So, taking a final look about him to assure himself that there was nothing further for him to do here, and to revel once more in the wild beauties of the scene, and rejoice in its fidelity to specifications, he started off through the woods at a quick pace.

For his work was not done yet. MacQuarrie had dared him to show him what kind of use he could make of his brains, and he had not relaxed a bit in his resolution to show him. And as he came out of the woods and struck the road he wondered just what were the things MacQuarrie himself would do, were he there.

"Have that tree chopped down first, I suppose," he thought aloud.

"You'll chop down no trees on *my* land!" declared a surly voice.

Dan, who had not realized that he had spoken his thoughts, started with surprise as he looked up into the scowling visage of a black-whiskered giant who had loomed around a curve in the road just in time to overhear his brief soliloquy.

It was no wonder if Dan gasped when he saw him. For the man must have been seven full feet in height, and his thick-soled boots and high-crowned Stetson hat added another six or eight inches to those that nature had given him. Built in perfect proportion, he was, without doubt, by far the biggest man that Dan had ever encountered. And it is small wonder that the youth wished himself elsewhere as he heard that growling voice and saw those ugly eyes levelled pugnaciously at him from under beetling black brows.

"Whose trees are you goin' to cut down?" the giant demanded, standing squarely before Dixon, with legs spread out and powerful arms folded across the deep chest. He was surely in no pleas-



"Whose trees are you goin' to cut down?"



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ant frame of mind, and it seemed to Dan that he was looking for a fight—massacre would be the more fitting term, he decided grimly.

“Why”—Dan summoned all his courage and, with an effort, controlled his voice. He was not a coward, but he knew he was no match for this freak of nature, who seemed bent on making trouble—“I don’t intend to cut down anybody’s trees, myself.”

“Then what were you talking about it for? Come on! Don’t you try to fool with me, you young whipper-snapper!”

“Why, I was thinking of hiring some one to cut a tree down back in the woods there—after getting permission from the owner, of course,” he added hastily. “I don’t think it will interfere with your land because it’s on the other side of the Little Rocky River.”

“Is it near the Falls?”

“Yes, just about.”

“What!” Dan couldn’t help jumping just a little at the volume and unexpectedness of the roar. He tried to dodge, but too late. The huge farmer seized him by the shoulder with a massive, warty paw and nearly lifted him off his feet. “You don’t think it would interfere with my land, eh? What do you know about my land? I’ll have you understand that I own every foot of land within a mile of Manitou Falls—north, south, east, and west! *Now* do you think it would interfere with my land? *Do you?*” he demanded, giving Dan a shake.

"But," expostulated the younger man, as the other paused for an answer, "how was I to know what land you own? You'll be paid a fair price for the tree, I assure you. And if you'll just let go of my shoulder for a minute, I can tell you how to make some more money." Dan felt that it would probably be necessary to pay this hulking brute for the use of the land and cabin by the Falls, and he might as well make him some kind of an offer now. It might have a propitiatory effect on him, and that was what he was playing for.

As the words sunk into the other's brain (whose development had evidently not kept pace with that of his physique), he blinked owlishly once or twice, and then, curiosity getting the better of him, he relaxed his grip on Dan's shoulder and waited for him to speak.

Dan explained his reasons for visiting the Falls, outlined in great detail the purpose for which the people he represented wanted to use the place, why it was desirable to fell the tree, etc. But he evidently failed to impress this hostile son of the soil.

"'Tain't true!" he declared. "Yer a timber-thief, an' that's all they is to it! An' if I ketch any of yer gang trespassin' on *my* land I'll fill 'em full of buckshot! I'll settle with *you* now!"

And without stirring a foot from his position he reached that wart-ridden paw for Dan's neck.

But this time Dixon saw it coming, and he was prepared. To dodge around the giant was out of the question, so great was the span of his legs. To

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back away would but delay the issue. So Dan did the next best thing. He dropped to the ground directly in front of the other, and as the giant stooped to reach him, rolled neatly between his legs!

He jumped up, and, giving the enemy a quick shove from behind, sent him sprawling head first into the dust, while Dan, considering that discretion, for the time being at least, was the better part of valour, legged it around the bend in the road and out of sight as fast as he could travel.

When he had put a safe distance between himself and immediate danger, he slowed down to a rapid walk and began to analyse the situation as it now stood with the introduction of this new and decidedly unfriendly element.

It was, indeed, distressing. There was the location—ideal. But without the permission of the owner, it was absolutely useless. And from pretty accurate and reliable indications, Dan judged that the chances of getting any kind of permission from the prodigy that owned Manitou Falls and the Haunted Hut were slight indeed. And he wondered if it were possible that failure could come now, when he had held success within his fingers. His teeth snapped as he set his jaw determinedly. He was not interested in failure, he told himself, and he had no time to consider anything in which he was not interested.

He had to acknowledge, though, that this was no ordinary obstacle that confronted him, but one that

might well require the ingenuity of a more experienced diplomat than he to effect a satisfactory adjustment.

He thought, as he walked doggedly back down the uneven trail towards East Quimby, of how much this might mean to him—how proud he would be to feel that he had been responsible for bringing the company to that beautiful section of the country. For he would feel then that he had *done* something, that he had been an effective cog—ever so slight, perhaps—in one of the wheels of the motion-picture industry.

But then the menacing figure of the brute who held the situation in the palm of his ugly hand rose up before his mind's eye, and he sighed in perplexity as he wondered how he was going to fight this battle. What weapons could he use against such an utterly unreasonable and unreasoning man?

"It's a shame!" he declared angrily, as at last he caught sight of the village in the valley that stretched away from the foot of the hill down which he was now walking rapidly. "It's a shame that something can't be done to prevent a man like that from hoarding such beautiful scenery. It's a wonder these people that live here wouldn't do something about it."

Perhaps they would, if they knew. But then, he reflected, why should they? The black-bearded giant was one of them, while he, Dan Dixon, and those whom he represented, were total strangers.

But supposing pressure could be brought to bear



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upon the quarrelsome landowner. To whose advantage would it be?

Dixon stopped still in his tracks and started mentally as the answer to his question popped into his head. Then his face cleared, and he started for the village on the run.

Perhaps it wouldn't work, he thought, but it was certainly worth a trial.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BRAIN VERSUS BRAWN

WHEN Douglas MacQuarrie came out of the projection-room at seven-thirty that morning, after watching a run-off of the scenes that had been filmed the day before, he was surprised to see Hugh Hammerson entering the studio through the main door.

Hammerson did not let on to see the director, but immediately took off his coat and hat, seized a broom from the wall-rack and began to sweep the floor with a most remarkable energy.

MacQuarrie smiled pityingly to himself as he closed the office door behind him. He knew a grandstand play when he saw it.

But Hammerson grinned wisely to himself as his superior passed out of sight into his office. He was sure that MacQuarrie had seen him, for very little escaped the director (as he knew to his regret!) and he imagined that his own early arrival and energetic activity had been interpreted as a sincere effort to make amends for his misdemeanours of the first part of the week.

For Hammerson did not want to lose his job. Not that he was at all interested in it, for he certainly was not. But he had found that there is a cer-

tain amount of glamour and romance woven about any one employed in a motion-picture studio, in the minds of certain shallow but imaginative people who have no idea what the inside of a studio looks like, and he rather enjoyed posing as assistant to Douglas O. MacQuarrie, the famous director.

Not only that, but handling the job the way he had handled—or mishandled it, it afforded him plenty of opportunity to loaf. And he was afraid that if he lost this job his father couldn't find him another one that would be quite as easy. The thought of finding one for himself never occurred to him. That, it seems, was entirely up to father!

As soon as he made quite sure that MacQuarrie's door had closed tightly, he straightened up and tossed the broom carelessly in a corner.

"Humph! That didn't last long, did it?"

The speaker was Eddie Jordan, who had himself gotten into the habit of arriving early and trying to get somewhere with his job.

"Who you talkin' to?" asked Hammerson threateningly.

"You, you big stiff," answered Eddie calmly. "What about it?"

Hugh had never been very successful in previous attempts to intimidate Eddie, and he didn't think that it was policy to start bullying him now. One reason was that the director was apt to open his office door and step out at an embarrassing moment. And then, too, he was just the least bit disconcerted at the way Eddie looked straight at him from those

clear blue eyes. He was much bigger and heavier than Eddie, but somehow Eddie didn't seem to be at all afraid of him.

A little change had come over Jordan during the last two weeks. He had begun to lose that pasty look, for one thing. His eye was clearer and his shoulders straighter. He was never seen puffing cigarettes now, and he appeared to take an active interest in his work. He no longer sneaked away into the property-room for an hour's sleep at every opportunity. Instead, when he felt drowsy, as he often did on these sultry summer days, he busied himself more actively about his work. And, although it cost him no little effort and required the full strength of his will, he soon found that such procedure had a more refreshing effect on him than had his stolen slumbers.

He had discovered that Dan was right about the cigarettes, and his head had ceased that dull, perpetual aching since he had given them up. Here again was his will-power taxed to the utmost. For, in addition to the never-easy task of breaking away from a pernicious habit of years' standing, he had also to overcome the very foolish but, strange to say, equally widespread delusion that, since he had used them for so long, cigarettes were actually necessary to his health and well-being. He had seemed to have the rather indefinite impression that, if he tried to do without them, some vague and terrible condition would overcome him. He didn't know just what it would be, but he thought it would have

something to do with his nerves. And for the first day or two after he quit smoking his physical condition seemed to confirm his fears. For nervous he certainly was. The least unexpected sound was enough to make him jump, and muscles twitched that he had hitherto never known were in his body. He was noticeably forgetful and constantly making mistakes. At the end of his second day of abstinence he sought out Dixon, on the strength of whose example he had decided to stop smoking.

"Danny," he said in despair, "it's no use. These last two days have been terrible. It's like a nightmare, only I can't wake up. I've got to give up, I guess. I can't get along without them."

Dan, who had been elated at his friend's resolve, thought fast, for he was determined that he should not weaken now, with the battle half won by a sincere beginning.

"Eddie," he said earnestly, "I think you've suffered during the last two days."

"Have I! I wouldn't go through them again for a million dollars!"

That was just the opening Dan wanted.

"Of course you wouldn't! And yet if you start smoking again, the time will come when you'll *have to quit to save yourself!* And then you'll have those first couple of days of agony all over again. And it will be worse the next time if you let yourself be licked now, you know."

There was food for thought in this, and it registered with Eddie.

"I know, Dan," he said after a moment, "but what am I going to do? I can't go on like this. Why, I haven't slept a wink in two whole nights!"

At once Dixon divined that this was probably the prime cause of Eddie's condition.

"As soon as you get home tonight, Eddie, take a good, hot footbath—as hot as you can stand it. Then open all your windows wide, jump into bed and forget your troubles."

So worn out was Eddie with two nights of wakeful tossing about in his bed that he probably would have slept from sheer exhaustion, anyway, before long. But the hot bath and well-circulating fresh air did wonders for him. And when he awoke in the morning he was surprised and delighted to find that, for the first time in months, his head was not aching. He did not feel entirely fit yet, by any means. But the improvement which he could see in himself was so marked and encouraging that from that time forth nothing could shake the firmness of his resolution.

The success of his attempt to achieve what he had at first thought to be impossible gave him a world of self-confidence. And, although he was by nature too keen a character-reader to have ever taken Hugh Hammerson seriously, he had never gone quite so far to show his disdain for Hugh before.

Hal Curtis, who knew of Eddie's friendship for Dan, had told him of the incident that had occurred on the previous afternoon, when Hammerson had

fallen down on his assignment, and Eddie earnestly hoped that Dan would "put it over," to use his own words, both to put Hammerson in his place, and, as Eddie thought loyally, to boost his friend to a higher place, to which he had proven his right.

He looked contemptuously at Hammerson now and waited for him to say something. But Hugh only grinned and walked over to the hook where he had hung his coat and hat, muttering something about "breaking his back when there's nobody around."

But just then MacQuarrie's door opened and the director came out of his office and walked rapidly in their direction. This time it was he who did not appear to see Hammerson, nor, indeed, to be aware of his existence. Instead, he addressed himself directly to Eddie.

"Jordan," he said, "as soon as Meadows shows up, I want you to go into the property-room and dig out all those props we used in the set on stage four yesterday. Meadows has the list. I've got some retakes to make on that set after all, and I want to get them out of the way first."

"All right, sir."

MacQuarrie wheeled and went back to his office.

Hammerson looked after him offendedly. He didn't think that was quite fair, to give those orders to Eddie, with him standing right there. Wasn't he MacQuarrie's assistant? His brain faltered at this thought. *Was* he? he wondered.

In his office, MacQuarrie was laying out his work

for the next sixteen or eighteen hours. He had before him a chart showing which groups of scenes it would be advisable to take together. He paused when he came to one particular group. They wouldn't be reached that day, but it was mightily important that they should be started the next, and he wasn't sure that they could be. For they were the scenes that required the waterfall location, and it began to look as though he was stumped. And the most important part of the story was woven around that location, without which the rest of the scenes would be deprived of their real significance.

And Kirk Kitson, he knew, was quite as anxious as he. He had telephoned twice the evening previous and once already that morning, ostensibly on other matters, but MacQuarrie had known what he wanted and answered his first inquiry by telling him the way Hammerson had fallen down on his job and subsequent calls by merely remarking that he had heard nothing from the man he had later sent out.

But somehow the director had not given up hope. He had a lot of faith in Dan, because the young fellow was a worker. And he was not afraid to stand up on his feet and acknowledge that he had a brain and demand a chance to use it, he reflected with a smile. But he grew serious again at the thought that he had to have his company on that location in less than thirty hours.

Up in East Quimby Dan Dixon was thinking thoughts of a similar nature. He consulted his time-

table and found that if he wanted to reach Fort Lee before MacQuarrie left the studio, he would have to get the train that left East Quimby at ten-thirty. And that was but two hours off. And as he walked rapidly down the dusty main street of the little village he wondered, not *if*, but just *how* he was going to make it. For he was determined that he would not leave East Quimby until he had exhausted every possibility of accomplishing his ends. And now he looked about for the best way to execute the strategic plan that had come to him back on the road down the mountain.

He crossed the road and entered a dry-goods store which, judging from its appearance, was about the most up-to-date emporium in the neighbourhood—and that wasn't saying much.

"Can you recommend me to a good hotel here in the village?" he asked the short, fat, and middle-aged storekeeper, who was wedged uncomfortably between the counter and a wall-shelf bearing bolts of calico.

The storekeeper scratched his head, appeared to ruminate, as if running over in his mind the list of hostelryes, and then, in a slow, sleepy drawl, he answered:

"I dunno what yuh wanta stay in East Quimby fer. There's a train out at ha'-pas' ten. But ef yuh *gotta* stay, guess you'd better try Peebles' Inn. Yuh'll like that's well as any other place around, I guess."

"Is that the biggest hotel there is here?"

"Sure—biggest, best, and only hotel in town."

"Is it modern? Is there running water in the rooms?"

The stolid, slow-witted merchant stared at him for a few seconds.

"Why, usta be," he drawled, as if surprised that this stranger should be so familiar with local conditions. "But that's all right now. Peebles hez hed th' roof fixed an' it don't leak no more lately. Needn't be 'fraid o' gittin' wet over there now, Mister."

Dan, deciding that the less he talked with this native the more he'd learn, thanked him for his kindness and left the store.

"Ef yuh don't git th' ha'-pas' ten train yuh won't git outta here 'til eight o'clock t'night!" the fat man called out after him as a final friendly admonition.

Dan crossed over to the opposite side of the street, and walking for a hundred yards, came to a big frame building with a wide veranda extending along its entire front, over the middle of which a painted sign-board bore the legend, "Peebles' Inn."

Lounging about the veranda in more or less fantastic postures of ease were half a dozen loiterers. And standing in the doorway was a strapping, red-shirted, sun-tanned man with iron-grey hair, whose easy air of proprietorship and keen eyes, which seemed to be always on the watch for business, told Dixon that this must be Peebles himself.

As soon as Dan made sure that he was seen by

one of the loungers, he stopped and looked up at the sign. Then he walked along a few paces, and, crossing the street, stopped and took another long look, scanning the hotel from cellar to roof, and wall to wall. Through the corner of his eye he could see the necks on the veranda craning in his direction, and Peebles himself had come down from the doorstep and was now standing by the veranda post, watching his actions interestedly.

Dan recrossed the street, walked to the end of the building, and stood for a time surveying its length admiringly. Then, with an exaggerated sigh and an expression of regret shadowing his face, he turned and started sadly down past the veranda, shaking his head slowly as he walked—the very picture of dejection.

Peebles was bursting with curiosity. He could not, by any stretch of his rather elastic imagination, conceive any reason that would account for this strange young man's peculiar actions. And as Dan was passing the point where he stood, he cleared his throat noisily. He simply could not let him pass without an explanation of some kind.

“Mornin', stranger!”

This was just what Dan expected and wanted. But in studio language, he registered mild surprise as he looked up.

“Oh! Good morning.” And he made as if to walk on.

“Er—ah—stranger in these parts?”

“Why—yes, I suppose I am.” He hesitated a

bit now, as though wavering in his decision to walk on. Peebles hastened to ask another question.

"Goin' ta stay in town long?" he inquired, with a more or less affable smile.

"Why, no. That is, I don't *think* so. I was—but—" He sighed again, shrugged his shoulders and left the unfinished sentence dangling aggravatingly before the inn-keeper's hungry imagination.

"Somethin' seem to be the trouble?" he asked sympathetically. "Ain't nuthin' I can do, is they?"

"No—I—I guess not."

Peebles began to fidget. *Why wouldn't* this fellow talk? *Why did* he insist on keeping his business so close to himself?

"Is this your hotel?" Dan asked casually, as though trying to change the subject.

"Yep!" was the rather proud answer. Peebles loved to pose as the "proprietor and lessee" of Peebles' Inn.

"It's a big one, isn't it? How many rooms have you?"

"Forty. Don't use many o' them much, though. Business been kinduh slack lately."

"Forty!" Dan's countenance was aglow with eager interest now. "Forty! That's great! That'll be just about right!" Then his face clouded as though he recalled an unpleasant thought. "Oh pshaw! I forgot." Then with another sigh he surveyed the hotel again. "But it would have been just about what they wanted, I'm sure. And," he added regretfully, "I know they would have liked

East Quimby. But it's no use now," he finished dejectedly. "When does the next train go?"

He got up from the step where he had sat for a minute and brushed his clothes as though preparing to move on. But friend Peebles, thoroughly baited, was not going to let this mysterious stranger depart now, particularly after dropping those aggravating hints as though he had intended to engage the whole forty rooms of Peebles' Inn.

"Looky here, Mister!" he began, jumping down to the ground beside him. "Was you sorta plannin' on bringin' yer fambly to East Quimby fer a spell?"

"Why, not exactly. But I did want to bring the company here for a few days. You see—but you wouldn't be interested in my troubles, I'm sure."

"'Deed I am! Yew don't know how interested I be!" he declared. And the village loafers, who had by divers means squirmed their respective ways into a little knot on the veranda just back of Peebles, nodded eagerly, as if to assure the stranger that they, too, were interested.

Dan could have laughed at the interest he had aroused by his simple ruse. But he checked the impulse, and upon being assured again of the close concern that the proprietor and lessee of Peebles' Inn felt for him, he reluctantly (?) told his story.

"That's Black Brian Burdette!" declared Peebles when he had finished. "An' it's jes' like th' mean skunk thet he is to do a trick like thet! What difference does it make t' him ef yew folks take some pictures on his land? Whut's he care ef yew chop

down a tree? He owns miles o' them. By Humphrey, we won't *let* him stop ye! 'Tain't fair! We jes' got t' prevent him somehow!"

Dan could have yelled with joy at the thoroughness with which the inn-keeper's sympathies had been enlisted in his behalf. He knew that if he had asked him outright to help him, he would have been eyed with suspicion. But by playing a little part, and showing the other without seeming to that considerable revenue would be lost to him if the company did not come to East Quimby, he had prompted Peebles to take the initiative in proffering his assistance.

"But how can we force him to let us trespass on his property? He is quite within his legal rights, isn't he?"

"Legal rights be durned!" snapped the other. "Come on! Let's go over t' th' bank."

Without stopping for hat or coat he led the way down the street to a red brick building, whose barred windows and heavy doors made Dan think at first that it was the jail, but which a neat, gilt-lettered wall-sign over the door proclaimed to be "The East Quimby Savings Bank."

Peebles escorted Dan into the building and through a door marked "A. K. Meacham, Pres. and Treas."

"Abe," he began without formality, addressing the startled little man who jerked himself around in his swivel chair at the intrusion, "you've got t' do somethin' about Black Brian. He's keepin' people

outa East Quimby through his pesky crankiness and gol-durned meanness!"

"What seems to be the trouble with Brian now, Lew?" asked the president, when he had recovered from his astonishment.

"Why, this young feller here come up all th' way from some Fort or 'nother way over in New Jersey last night jes' t' find a place t' take movin'-pitchers. He's located the place he wants up at th' Manitou, an' thet ugly skunk of a Black Brian hez warned him off'n his property an' threatened t' shoot th' company ef he ketches them settin' a foot on his land! Now ain't thet a purty kettle o' fish?" he wound up with a snort of disgust.

Meacham pursed his lips in thought for a moment. He owned a little piece of land himself, back there in the woods, and he thought he saw a chance to do business. He could readily see why Peebles should want the company to come, as it would mean business for the inn. For his part he was quite willing to boost Peebles' business—provided he made something by it himself. He addressed himself to Dan.

"Ahem! I've got a very attractive piece of property out that way myself, Mister—ah—Mister—"

"Dixon," supplied Dan, and without waiting for him to finish he asked abruptly, "Is there a waterfall on it?"

"Well, no, I don't know's there's a waterfall on it, but of course that can probably be overcome all right. Now it's assessed for—"

"I'm afraid I wouldn't be interested in it, Mr. Meacham. The waterfall is most important. That's the reason I'm so anxious to get Mr. Burdette's permission to use Manitou Falls. And if there's any way you can suggest—"

But Meacham was disgruntled. He turned back to his desk and reopened his ledger.

"'Fraid I can't help you," he snapped.

"But, Abe!" expostulated Peebles, dismayed as the prospective prosperity of Peebles' Inn began to vanish. "Can't you—"

"The law protects property-owners from trespassers, and Burdette's privileged to keep intruders off his own land. I won't interfere—that's certain."

Peebles looked at Dan with a helpless gesture as if to say, "That settles it! He won't do it, and nobody else can." Disappointment was written large all over his face.

Dixon looked out of the window dejectedly. He had fought hard, but it looked as though the game was lost. He would have to go back to MacQuarrie and admit that he was beaten. It was hard. Ham-merson would laugh too, and sneer openly at him. As husky as he was, Dan felt that he could cry that moment with vexation and disappointment.

A summer breeze swept lightly down the street outside, and gently swung, on its iron bar, a big sign on the store directly opposite the bank. The motion caught Dan's sorrowful eye, and he read, without really meaning to, the inscription it bore: "A. K. Meacham, Groceries and Supplies."

Ah! This, then, would be the banker's vulnerable point!

Dan, his eyes dancing with hope, gestured significantly to Peebles, who was starting for the door. The inn-keeper looked sharply at him, wondering what new argument had occurred to him. But Dan only signalled him to be quiet and let him do the talking. Then he sighed audibly for the banker's benefit, and when he spoke, a note of keen regret seemed to shake his voice.

"Well, I suppose that settles it, then. We can't come to East Quimby. I'm sorry, too, because I know the company would enjoy it up here. It would be a regular picnic for them to start out from the Inn early in the day, work all morning by the Falls, and then, at noon, gather around an open fire and cook the *groceries and supplies* that they would bring with them from the village."

Dan watched the banker narrowly as he said this. There was a perceptible stiffening of the spine when he mentioned "*groceries and supplies.*" Peebles, understanding Dixon's ruse now, shook with suppressed laughter at the boy's resourcefulness.

"But," continued Dan, after a moment, during which Meacham seemed to be pondering some weighty problem far away from Dan or Black Brian, "I see it's no use. Good day, Mr. Meacham."

He took a slow, heavy step in the direction of the door.

"Er—ah—Mister Dixon—er—how many people did you say were in your company?" Meacham

had swung casually about in his chair again, and he smiled amiably.

"I don't think I said, did I?" inquired Dan innocently.

"Well, maybe you didn't. Come to think of it, I don't know as you did. But—ah—about how many were you thinking of bringing up here?"

"Why—" Dan performed a rapid calculation in his head. "Probably between thirty and forty. Why?"

"Umm!" Meacham did some mental arithmetic. "And how long did you figure on staying in town?"

"Maybe two days—maybe two weeks. It all depends on circumstances."

"Umm!" Groceries and supplies to feed thirty or forty people once a day for between two days and two weeks. It might mount up! "Take a chair, Mr. Dixon. Sit down, Lew. I don't know but what we might find some way of arranging this after all. There's no reason why Black Brian should prevent a large party of cultured people from paying a visit to East Quimby. It will advertise the village—that's what it will do!"

"Yes siree, sir! That's jes' what it'll do!" agreed Peebles, as he crossed his lengthy legs and winked quite openly at Dan.

"Ira!" Meacham called through the open door. "Bring in those Burdette mortgages, will you?"

A young man entered after a moment and deposited a bundle of documents on the banker's desk.

"Let's see, now." Meacham looked through

them methodically and selected one which he opened and scanned quickly. "Yes—here we are!" Turning to Dixon he asked, "When will your company arrive, Mr. Dixon?"

"Will it be safe to bring them?" asked Dan eagerly.

"Absolutely," smiled the banker, with pompous assurance. "The interest on one of Burdette's mortgages is overdue ten days now. I know he hasn't got the money, and I'll threaten to start foreclosure proceedings unless he gives you permission to trespass and make whatever use of his property you want while you are there. When may we expect you folks?"

"Tomorrow noon—if I can make that ten-thirty train!" He had quite forgotten the time, and was amazed when he looked at his watch to find that his train would leave in ten minutes. And the station was at the other end of the village, nearly a mile away.

"You can make it all right if you'll let me drive you in my car. The banker beamed on him now.

"That will be fine! Thank you very much! And—oh, say!" His eye fell for the first time on a framed picture over Meacham's desk. It was a splendid coloured photograph of the picturesque Manitou Falls, showing the Haunted Hut and the background of thick forest. "Could you lend me that picture until tomorrow noon, Mr. Meacham? I'll see—"

"Take it right along, Mr. Dixon. But come—we have no time to lose. Coming, Lew?"

"Don't mind if I do, Abe."

As they sped up the street both the banker and the inn-keeper professed anxiety to do anything in their power to help Dan along. Dan thought of the tree that should be felled and, describing its exact location and the position in which it should lie by means of the photograph, was assured that the tree should be felled that afternoon, whether or no.

The train was steaming into the little station while Dan still asked questions as fast as they could pop into his head. He afterwards said that he made more arrangements and acquired more information in that ten minutes than he had ever before done in a week.

He shook hands heartily with his newly-formed acquaintances, and stepped on the train just as it began to move out of the station to start its five-hour drag to the Grand Central Terminal.

"Bright boy, that," declared Banker Meacham, as Dixon waved at them from the car platform. "Seems to know just what he wants."

"Yep!" agreed Inn-keeper Peebles. "And," he added with a sly grin and a sidelong look, "seems to know jes' how t' git it, too!"

Dan settled himself in the coach with a happy sigh. He was too excited to think.

For he had fought his battle, met serious reverses and, at the blackest hour, had snatched the burning brand of victory from the ravishing flame of defeat!

CHAPTER NINE

DAN DELIVERS THE GOODS

MACQUARRIE began to worry after lunch. Perhaps he had been foolish to trust the matter to that inexperienced boy anyway. He would send some one else now, before it was too late, and tell them to find something, if it was only a stream of water. Perhaps they could rig some kind of a contrivance that would give a waterfall effect. He knew in his heart, though, that that would never do.

But, on second thought, who would he send that would be any better than Dixon? Charlie Goldberg was the only one that he could be sure of, and he couldn't spare Charlie. Well, there was only one other thing to do—wait until morning and go himself. And this, by the elimination of all other means, was what he finally made up his mind to do. But he groaned as he thought of the hours and hours—perhaps days—of tremendously valuable time he would have to sacrifice wandering around looking for a location that he wasn't sure existed.

He went into his office, and, calling Kirk Kitson on the phone, told him the situation.

“I'm sorry, Mr. Kitson, but it's the only way out that I can see.”

The head of the corporation made no answer at first.

"Well," he said after a while, "it's too bad, Mac. That'll cost us a few thousand dollars in cancelled contracts, you know, if the picture isn't ready on release date. But it isn't your fault, old man, and it can't be helped. So just do the best you can—that's all."

That was Kitson all over, reflected MacQuarrie with a little glow of appreciation; considerate to a fault and philosophical in misfortune.

"Well, I guess that's the answer," he said to himself, as he stood up wearily and started for his set. For a reverse of this kind tired MacQuarrie more than a long grilling day with the megaphone. For that was constructive. These set-backs tore down instead of building.

Hammerson had put in his morning in keeping out of MacQuarrie's way. He didn't know whether he was to consider his connection with the studio at an end or not. He hoped not, fervently. And he decided to consider himself a member of the director's staff until he had something more definite to go by. If Hammerson had an ounce of common sense, or a jot of self-respect, he would have gone to MacQuarrie, acknowledged his wrong, apologized and resigned on the spot. This process never occurred to Hugh, however. He wasn't built along those lines.

He saw the director approaching from his pri-

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vate office immediately after lunch, and, seeing that their paths were bound to cross, made up his mind to act as though nothing whatever had happened. Mac had cut him early in the morning and given his orders to Eddie Jordan, to be sure. But, reasoned Hugh inanely, he had probably forgotten the whole incident by this time. So, with a forced air of confidence, he advanced towards the director.

"Good afternoon, Mr. MacQuarrie! 'Snice day today, ain't it?"

MacQuarrie stopped and looked at him for a full ten seconds without a word. Then he lowered his head between his shoulders and stuck out his lower jaw.

"Hammerson," he said, and his voice was calm with a deadly calm, "I don't care where you go—but get out of my sight! Pronto!"

Hugh turned a dull red and hastily passed on. It seemed that "Mac" had not forgotten the incident as yet. Not completely, anyway.

Eddie Jordan, whom MacQuarrie had pressed into service to take the place Dan had occupied on the set for the few hours before leaving for northern New York, witnessed this little incident, and he quietly passed the word to Charlie Goldberg and members of the company to "watch their steps—the chief is on the war-path."

This was not exactly true, for MacQuarrie had no grudge against any one in the studio—not even

Hammerson, for whom he felt only contempt. But when he became—no matter how innocently—an instrument through which Kirk Kitson lost money, it had a mighty unpleasant effect on him. And he couldn't help showing his feelings.

Everything was more or less unsatisfactory that afternoon. First, Hank Meadows mislaid some very important props. and a half-hour was lost while the whole company searched for them. The fact that Meadows finally found them in his own pocket did not serve to improve matters any. Then a fuse blew out somewhere along the line, and the whole studio was without electric current for another half-hour. After that was remedied, and Charlie Goldberg was grinding away on a retake of a scene which had been filmed yesterday, but in which the director's keen eye had detected a flaw at the morning run-off, MacQuarrie growled:

"Cut!"

He had discovered that one of the actors in the scene was in an entirely different costume than he had worn during the same scene yesterday, and made the offender repair to his dressing-room for a complete change at once.

By this time MacQuarrie's nerves were on edge. And those of his company were little better. For they knew just what was the matter and they sympathized keenly with their director. He was one of those men who, as Eddie Jordan once phrased it, "always had his cards right out on the table." He always took his company into his confidence in any

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matter that affected them, for he felt that that gave them more confidence in him and greater interest in their own work.

And now they understood his present position and their feelings responded in kind to his own. So it developed that by the middle of the afternoon a stranger would have said that every individual on that stage was wearing a bomb-proof frown. And the scene which they were trying to retake was light comedy!

It is easy enough to enact a heavy dramatic scene when one is feeling jocose and merry. But the contrary is not so easy; for when one is disturbed in mind and is conscious that those around one are equally distressed, it is no passing fun to try to do a light and gay piece of acting. And MacQuarrie groaned inwardly at the way the scene was being ruined.

About four-thirty Kirk Kitson put in an appearance. His interest in "Flames of Conquest" was the deepest of all. His was the money involved, and he had involved a good deal more than he could really afford. Consequently, he felt that anything that tended to pile up unnecessary and unproductive expenditure must be investigated and eliminated. And if this picture, for which many contracts had already been signed with some of the leading theatrical circuits of the United States, was not completed on scheduled time, the result would be that many of the contracts would be cancelled, and in addition to the financial loss entailed, his reputation for living

up to the terms of a contract would be seriously impaired.

And so it was that an apparently little thing, like a day or two of delay in starting work on a location, might eventually have serious consequences. But, it might be objected, why is not allowance made for these delays when the release date of a picture is first arbitrarily settled? Of course such allowance might be made, and in some cases is. But the sooner a picture is released the sooner is revenue derived from it. And again, looking at it from an entirely different angle, the earlier the release date the less chance there is of some outlaw concern producing a cheap picture on the same subject with the same or similar title, and thus seriously injuring the possibilities of the original production.

To be sure, a delay might easily be remedied by slighting or speeding work on some other part of the picture. But the results of such methods are never satisfactory and neither Kitson nor MacQuarrie would sanction them for the fraction of a second. No, no matter how long it took to complete a picture, neither of them would permit it to be released until every scene was as perfect as was within their power to make it.

"Mac," said Kitson as MacQuarrie still struggled with the unsatisfactory scene, "drop that for a second, will you? I want to talk to you."

The director—and the company too, incidentally—had no objection to being interrupted in a task which had come to be an aggravation. So he joined

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the Big Chief as Kitson was affectionately called by his staff, and as they talked, they walked slowly about the set. The others present lapsed into a subdued silence. For Kitson's face was grave. And as he listened, MacQuarrie grew grave, too.

"Mac, what are our chances of finishing 'Flames of Conquest' for October fifteenth release?"

MacQuarrie shook his head.

"Not very good, I'm afraid. You know we timed it pretty close in the beginning. And even if it weren't for this delay which we are about to suffer, we wouldn't have any time to spare. As it is—well, you know how necessary those waterfall scenes are. And we're stopped now until we get them."

Kitson's face looked white and drawn of a sudden. He grasped his companion's arm in fingers that bit the flesh.

"Mac," he whispered tensely, "'*Flames of Conquest*' must be finished for October fifteenth release! I didn't intend to tell you this, because I didn't want you to be hampered by an added burden of worry. But circumstances force me to let you know the full necessity of the case. Mac, day before yesterday I sold the European rights for this picture to Manuel Herrera."

"Well?"

"He sails for Liverpool October fifteenth and he insists that he be given a print of the picture on that date to take back with him. Now the Consolidated people are working on a big special production which

they tried to have him buy the European rights for instead of ours, and as the only thing he hesitated over was getting the print on that date, I agreed that he should have it. Mac, he's paying me seven hundred thousand dollars for the European rights, *but before he would close the contract I had to post a guarantee of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars that the picture would be ready October fifteenth!*"

They had stopped walking now and were standing just at the edge of the set. MacQuarrie's face was pale and set as the seriousness of the situation confronted him. Kitson's hand shook as he relighted the stub of his cigar which he had permitted to go out as he talked.

"And we couldn't cut down on the picture in any way, even if we wanted to, because I had to give him an endorsed copy of the scenario and the contract specifies that the picture as delivered must conform to the scenario in every detail. Mac, now you see why it's got to be done, don't you?"

MacQuarrie's jaw set with a snap.

"Mr. Kitson, if I could know that by tomorrow noon my company could be working on the waterfall location, I'd promise to finish 'Flames of Conquest' for October fifteenth. But—"

"Go ahead and promise, Mr. MacQuarrie! There's a train for East Quimby at ten-thirty tonight and one at five-thirty tomorrow morning. You can make it easy!"

So deeply engrossed had they been in their conversation that they had not heard Dan's footsteps

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as he had approached them from behind a couple of minutes before. He had just entered the studio and, eager to report the success of his mission to MacQuarrie, who had dared him to make good, he had gone directly to where the director was standing with Kitson. And as he waited impatiently for MacQuarrie to turn and see him, he could not help overhearing snatches of the conversation. He had not intended to interrupt them, but so anxious was he to let his superior know that he had made good that the words just popped right out of his mouth without prompting.

MacQuarrie turned sharply and looked at him with a frown. But he saw a smile on the lad's face that was frown-proof. The next instant he jumped to Dan's side and seized the framed photograph from under his arm where he had been carrying it.

And then—he forgot his dignity, for the first time on record!

“Look! Mr. Kitson!” He almost fell over himself in his efforts to reach the corporation head. “Look quick! It's perfect!”

The warm colour came back into both their faces and for some unknown reason they started shaking hands with each other. Then simultaneously they turned to Dan.

The company, seeing that something had happened to raise the cloud of gloom which had descended over the set, were approaching in ones and twos to the end where the three stood and, at a respectful distance, formed in little groups around

them. Even Hammerson, his curiosity getting the better of what little grain of pride he had, sidled along towards them, taking pains, however, to keep out of MacQuarrie's sight as much as possible.

"Dixon, what is this place?"

"Manitou Falls and the Haunted Hut, three and a half miles northeast of East Quimby, New York, as the crow flies, eight miles over the road."

"How far is it?"

"A hundred and sixty miles from here, sir."

"A hundred and sixty?" MacQuarrie looked incredulous. "But how could you get up there and back between this morning and—" he consulted his watch, "four-fifty in the afternoon?"

"I started last night on the ten-thirty train."

MacQuarrie beamed.

"Good! That's the stuff! But let's get down to brass tacks. Did you see the owner of this place?"

"*Did* I? I should say I did!" Dixon shivered at the recollection of his encounter with Black Brian.

"What did he say?"

"He said," Dan answered with a smile, "that if he caught anybody prowling around his property, he'd fill 'em full of buckshot!"

MacQuarrie was crestfallen at this. Kitson, too, looked up from the photograph with a disturbed frown.

"I thought it sounded too good," he remarked.

"How are you going to fix it, Mac?"

"It's all fixed," spoke up Dan.

"How much did you have to pay him?" inquired MacQuarrie.

"Pay him? Not a cent! I persuaded the president of the bank up there to foreclose a mortgage on him if he didn't let us trespass on his property."

"But how in the world did you swing that?"

Dan outlined briefly the little ruse by means of which he had enlisted the inn-keeper and the banker. MacQuarrie listened attentively to every word, and a light of respect began to gleam in his black eyes. And Kitson, too, although he was still studying the photograph, was no less interested in the recital. As the boy finished, the two older men exchanged significant glances.

"By the way, young man,"—Kitson addressed Dan for the first time—"this photograph doesn't appear to coincide exactly with the required specifications as I remember them from the original scenario."

Dan saw what was coming and hastened to explain.

"You mean the fallen tree," and then, as Kitson nodded, "I arranged to have this tree—here in the foreground—" he indicated the one in the picture, "cut down at a height of four feet from the ground in such a way that it will fall naturally in just the right direction. It has probably been done by now."

Kitson smiled approvingly and was about to speak. But he was interrupted by MacQuarrie calling,

"Hammerson!"

There was no answer, and he called again—not so loudly, but more authoritatively. This time he got results.

"Ye—yes, Mister MacQuarrie. I'm comin'!"

Hugh looked at the director uncomfortably and wondered what was going to happen.

"Hammerson," said MacQuarrie, "now do you know what I mean when I refer to *brains*?"

"Bu—but Mister Mac—MacQuarrie!" stammered the lumbering loafer, who seemed to feel that before this brief interview was over he was going to have definite reason to consider himself an ex-employee of the Kitson studios, "that place there is a hundred and sixty miles off, he said so himself. And you didn't tell me I could go so far. Did you now, Mister MacQuarrie?"

"No, I didn't. And I didn't tell you you couldn't, either, did I? And I didn't tell Dixon that *he* could or couldn't, either. But he *did* it! There's the difference right there. And," he added significantly, "he knew what kind of a location he was going after, too."

"But listen, Mister MacQuarrie, s'pos'n' I did too—s'pos'n' I did. Still an' all, how should I know there was just the right kind of a place away up in New York State? How should I know, I ask you? I ain't lucky at guessin' like some fellers, you know, Mister MacQuarrie, I ain't, so how should I know, huh?"

Something told him that he was slipping fast,

and Kitson's presence made him fight doubly hard. But it was the hopeless fight of the cornered rat.

"How should you know? How did Dixon know? Suppose we ask him? How did you happen to hit this place, Dixon?"

"I went to a tourists' agency in New York, sir, and told them the kind of a place I wanted. They directed me to Manitou Falls," Dan answered. Somehow he didn't feel greatly interested in the conversation. He felt queer.

MacQuarrie turned back to Hammerson with a triumphant look.

"See? That's how *he* knew. And that's how *you* could have known. Now as far as I'm concerned, you're done!"

Hammerson looked at him and then at Kitson pleadingly.

"Won't you—won't you please give me another chance, Mr. Kitson—won't you please?" he begged. "You won't be sorry—honest you won't. You know my father, you know. Just one more chance, please?"

Kitson felt sorry for him. Perhaps it wasn't all his fault. His bringing up had been lax, he knew. But, he recalled, and his heart hardened at the recollection, he hadn't even made an honest effort. And his indifference to responsibility might have cost Kitson a lot of money. No—men of this type were dangerous to their employers. Their negligence could have too serious consequences. And as

Hammerson continued to beg for another chance, a hard look came into his eyes.

"I'll give you a chance, Hammerson," he said at last. Hugh started a fawning smile of hypocritical gratitude, but there was a look in the speaker's eyes that was not good to see. "I'll give you a chance to get out of this studio in good health if you can make that big door down there in ten seconds! If you can't, I won't be responsible for what happens to you!" And that look in his eye told Hammerson that he meant every word of what he said. Kitson took out his watch.

"That ten seconds starts—*now!*"

As though that last word were the starter's pistol and he in competition for track honours, Hugh started for the indicated door. And it is not recorded that he stopped to get his hat or coat.

As Hammerson flew out of the set, Dixon turned and looked about for a place to sit down. Somehow he felt weak, and he staggered a bit as he took a step towards a chair. He had never felt like this before.

The others were watching Hammerson's mad dash for safety and were cheering lustily, with the exception of MacQuarrie and Eddie Jordan. They saw Dan pass a hand across his eyes and waver a little, and they reached his side just in time to catch him as he dropped limply.

"Quick, Jordan! His feet! Now to that couch over there! Gangway," he called imperatively and a path was cleared instantly.

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They sat him on the edge of the couch and then, as Kitson forced his way through the wide circle into which Eddie was marshalling the people who were starting to crowd around, MacQuarrie forced Dixon's head down until it was well between his knees.

The blood was forced quickly back into Dan's head by the operation and in another minute he looked around him dazedly and drew his hand across his forehead with an uncertain gesture.

"I—I wonder what's the matter with me?" he asked weakly. "I feel so—so queer!"

Kitson looked worried. He had already decided that this boy was valuable and he hoped he wasn't going to fall sick. MacQuarrie, too, was disturbed, but as a thought struck him, he spoke sternly to Dan.

"Look here, Dixon! What did you have for lunch?"

Dan looked up at him and blinked. Then he smiled wanly.

"I—I guess that's the trouble, Mr. MacQuarrie. I didn't have any!"

"I thought so. How long since you did eat?"

Dan thought back, and he was surprised himself.

"I had a sandwich in the Grand Central Station about quarter-past ten last night. And come to think of it, that was the first I'd had since lunch yesterday!"

MacQuarrie sat down beside him. His face was stern, but in his heart he could have hugged this

husky young fellow who had delivered the goods without thought of self.

"Dixon," he asked, "why did you do such a thing? Why didn't you get something to eat?"

"Why, I'll tell you, Mr. MacQuarrie," Dan answered frankly, "I was so busy that I forgot all about eating. And Gee! But it was fun!"

An hour later Dan was, as he described it, "in the lap of luxury." MacQuarrie had had Hank Meadows break out a brass bedstead with box springs, thick mattress and downy pillows from the prop-room, and set it in Hal Curtis's dressing-room. Hal had insisted upon this location. Then a pair of silk pajamas had been acquired from the wardrobe mistress. Dan had been stripped, put under a piping hot shower bath and given a vigorous rubdown by Hal and Eddie, after which he had donned the pajamas and slipped in between the refreshing sheets.

By this time the steward from the restaurant had appeared, in response to MacQuarrie's telephoned summons, bearing a big tray which was laden with a full course dinner.

"I don't suppose that a doctor would approve of this treatment for a starved person," the director smiled as he stood at the foot of the bed and enjoyed the relish with which Dan was attacking a sirloin steak. "But I'll gamble on your constitution being able to stand that much abuse. By the way," he asked suddenly as another thought oc-

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curred to him, "did you starve yourself on sleep, too?"

"Oh no, sir!" replied Dan, when he had swallowed a mouthful of asparagus tips on toast. "I slept on the train going up last night."

"Umm. I guess I know about how much rest you got out of that. Let's see—what time did you say that morning train leaves for East Quimby?"

"At five-thirty."

MacQuarrie consulted his watch.

"It's now six-thirty. When you've finished eating, you go to sleep. I'll call you at four. That'll give you nine hours to make up some sleep. We'll have breakfast here, and then we'll drive over in my car and meet the company on the train. How does that strike you?"

Dan's eyes were shining happily.

"Am—am I going up to East Quimby with the company?"

"I should say you are!" declared MacQuarrie heartily. "You see," he added with pretended seriousness, "I'm afraid of that big—what's his name?—Black Brian up there. And I may need you to tame him for me! And besides," he continued carelessly, "any director is considerably handicapped on location if his assistant director isn't with him, you know."

Dan's eyes opened wide.

"But—and—OH! Am I to be your assistant, Mr. MacQuarrie?"

"You bet your life you are! You see," he

lapsed again into mock earnestness, "I didn't want to give you the job, but Mr. Kitson was right there you know, and he wanted me to do it. Of course, that isn't a very good sign for you, because it was on the strength of his request that I put Hammerson in on the same job. But then, what's the use? I told Mr. Kitson that as long as he had given Hammerson 'another chance,' they both grinned at the recollection, "that I'd give him one, and let him put you in as my assistant."

MacQuarrie was in great good humour. And why shouldn't he be? For Dan's timely return had seemed to alter the face of everything about the set. The company had sensed that the situation had changed for the better and had gone to work with a will—with such a will in fact, that the remainder of the afternoon saw the satisfactory accomplishment of all the work that the director had laid out for the day, and which had fallen so discouragingly behind.

As exhausted as he was, Dan found difficulty in composing himself for sleep. He was happy—happier than he ever remembered being in his life. And as at last his senses slipped their moorings and sailed into the unchartered sea of Dreamland, he smiled contentedly.

CHAPTER TEN

ON LOCATION

WHEN Hammerson left the Kirk Kitson studios on that momentous August afternoon he had something that in the twenty-odd years of his existence, he had never had before—an object in life. But unfortunately it was not a good object, for it was built on a bad foundation—hatred.

Like all others of his ilk he thought, or professed to think, that he had been treated unfairly. And whenever you want to stir up feelings of unreasoning hostility in the heart of an average man, just convince him that he has not been given a “square deal” and you will have accomplished your purpose.

Hugh Hammerson, having been spoiled and pampered from childhood, did not need to be convinced that he deserved much better treatment than he had received, for he had the typical bully’s outlook on life: his was the privilege of harassing with impunity; but let no man attempt to harass him, no matter what the justification may be!

And so it required but little exercise of his imagination for him to consider that he had a real grievance against Kitson, MacQuarrie, and Dan

Dixon. The more he thought of it, the more prominent a position in the arraignment did he give Dan Dixon. For if Dan had not returned from his mission successful where he himself had failed, MacQuarrie and Kitson would never have gotten "down on him." Of course this reasoning was entirely fallacious. But it satisfied Hammerson quite completely.

And now he centered his mind on the problem of squaring accounts with them all. And that brain which had refused to work for a legitimate end, now seemed to stir itself and to become endowed with a certain craftiness that was bound to be effective.

When, an hour before, Kitson in distress had unfolded to MacQuarrie the significance of the sale of the European rights of "Flames of Conquest" and the forfeit condition of the contract, Hammerson had been within three feet of them. After the director had warned him out of his sight right after lunch he had gone behind the set and, throwing himself lazily upon a pile of burlap right beside the scenery, had fallen asleep. The sound of voices near at hand had awakened him, and separated from them by only a thin partition he had heard every word of the conversation.

And as the scene came back to him now he was quick to grasp the possibilities of the situation. If he could only think up some way to prevent that picture from being finished for October fifteenth release. Better still, to ruin the picture beyond pos-

sibility of release at any date! *That* would come pretty near teaching Mister Kitson his lesson. And if the downfall of MacQuarrie and Dan Dixon could be accomplished at the same time— Ah! his revenge would be complete!

It is surprising—and not pleasant—to see how active-minded a man of Hammerson's type can be when the object is unworthy. No sooner had he arrived at this point in his cogitations than another thought occurred to him. The Consolidated! He knew them by reputation to be an unscrupulous corporation and the foe of every upright organization in the industry. Time after time had they been sued and time after time had heavy damages been levied against them. But Bellamy and Porter, the president and treasurer respectively, continued their underhanded methods and bragged quite openly that "it was cheaper to pay a few thousand dollars fine for stealing a picture than it was to make one."

Hammerson recalled the reference that Kitson had made to the Consolidated and he reasoned shrewdly that it would be to the material advantage of the dishonest corporation as well as to Kitson's disadvantage, if "Flames of Conquest" were to be delayed or ruined. A plan was forming in Hammerson's mind.

He stopped long enough at a pay-station to call the studio and ask for Joe Morrison. Joe, he knew, was playing a bit in some of the scenes that were to be taken on the new location. And he knew he could depend upon Joe.

"Listen, Joe," he began when Morrison's voice reached him over the wire, "this is Hugh—but don't let them hear you say my name, understand? Now tell me—when does the company start for East Quimby?"

"MacQuarrie just told us to report at the Grand Central for a five-thirty train tomorrow morning."

"All right. Now as soon as you get there you telegraph me the name of the hotel, see? I may want to get in touch with you while you're up there. Understand?"

Enjoining him again against letting any one know to whom he had been talking, Hammerson hung up the receiver.

An hour later he crossed Times Square and turned off Broadway into one of the Forties.

As late as it was, John K. Bellamy and Roger Porter were still at their place of business. They were in the former's private office when a boy entered and informed them that a Mr. Hammerson from the Kirk Kitson Corporation wanted to see them. They exchanged puzzled glances and Bellamy told the boy to show the caller in. A moment later Hugh Hammerson was in their presence.

"What can we do for you, Mr. Hammerson?" asked Bellamy directly.

Hammerson, without being invited, sat down and made himself comfortable.

"Nothing," he answered. "But it strikes me that I might be in a position to do something for you, perhaps."

He weathered the glances of suspicion that followed his statement with a look of satisfaction and self-importance at having aroused their interest.

"Well, what's on your mind?" demanded Porter. "Out with it!"

As Hammerson talked, the suspicious attitude of his auditors changed by imperceptible degrees to one of intense interest. Porter chewed his cigar with a trace of suppressed excitement and Bellamy's eyes gleamed maliciously. Here was an opportunity that harmonized thoroughly with their plans. With Kitson's picture not available on the promised release date, it would be an easy matter to persuade Manuel Herrera that theirs was the proper picture to substitute for it, and too, Herrera, being in possession of the quarter of a million dollars guarantee which Kitson would forfeit by default, would be in position to pay a heavy price indeed for their picture!

Bellamy excused himself politely to Hammerson when the latter had done speaking, and, beckoning his partner to follow, withdrew into a little antechamber for a private conference.

"What do you think of it?" he asked as Porter closed the door tightly behind him.

"The idea? It looks great—looks like just what we want."

"Yes, I know. But the fellow himself—this Hammerson. Can we trust him? Is he on the level about it, or is it some scheme that Kitson is trying to get us in trouble with?"

Porter shrugged his shoulders a bit.

"Who knows? But in my opinion I don't think you need to worry about that part of it. In the first place, he doesn't look the type of fellow that Kitson would use if he were trying to double-cross us. He strikes me like some youngster that's got a grudge against the Kitson outfit and is just anxious to square it and figures that it would be to our advantage to finance him. It would, too, as far as I can see. But in the second place, Bellamy, even if it's as you suspect and this is part of a game that Kitson's playing, you and I can keep our tracks covered easily enough so they couldn't get anything on us. Don't do anything in writing, and make all payments cash. That," he added conceitedly as though the idea originated with him, "is the first rule for keeping out of trouble."

Bellamy was silent for a while, and when he spoke it was as one who had made up his mind.

"I think you're right, Roger. I'll leave it to you to handle him. Pay him his own price. It'll be worth it if it goes through. If it doesn't—well, we've guessed wrong before."

Bellamy took himself off through another door and Porter rejoined Hammerson. Hugh, who had begun to think that perhaps they were sending for the police, was immensely relieved at the cordial attitude Porter assumed towards him during the balance of the interview. And he felt highly elated as he arose to go, for Porter thrust a handful of green-backs into his hand and whispered that there

was more where they came from—"don't run short!" This was easier, at that, he reflected with a sly grin, than dodging work around the studio.

He started for home intending to mature his plans there. But he thought of his father and his lifelong friendship for Kitson, and a feeling of hot shame surged over him. He could not face him now, knowing in his heart that he was plotting against his best friend. That much decency was left in Hammerson. So he altered his course until he arrived at a Broadway hotel where he registered and retired to the room assigned him. But he felt like an outcast. Already the satisfaction of anticipated vengeance was beginning to wane.

But he thought of the studio just then, and as the scene of his humiliation was recalled to his imagination his blood became fired again with the old blind hatred. And he determined, come what may, to go through with the plans that were already half-formed in the back of his brain.

The five-thirty train for East Quimby on the following morning found the full company prepared for the journey to the north. A score of trunks full of costumes and properties were loaded into the baggage car, the conductor called his "All Aboard!" and they started on their trip.

Dan felt, as he started north for the second time in thirty-one hours, fine and fit after his long sleep. When the director had called him for breakfast, he bounded out of bed, under the cold shower and into

his clothes so eagerly that he was ready before MacQuarrie himself. After a substantial breakfast they had set off in MacQuarrie's roadster on a refreshing ride through the mid-summer dawn. Dan could not help but wonder if it was only the dawn previous through which he had climbed the rough mountain trail to Manitou Falls. So much of vital importance had transpired since he had stood on the knoll in the little clearing and surveyed the glories of the sunrise that it seemed that at least a week must have elapsed.

The company, for the most part, was quiet as the train started its long up-state pull. They had retired early, many of them, in anticipation of the early call, but it would be a couple of hours yet before they would be thoroughly awakened. This was the hard part of the life to them—this early rising, long, hot, and dusty train rides to locations, putting up with the inconvenience of country life for days on end. But to the younger folks, these affairs were larks. The novelty of the thing had not worn off as yet for them and these jaunts came as welcome breaks in what they regarded as the monotony of studio routine.

Eddie Jordan was among those present, and he was overjoyed. For this was the first long trip he had been sent on with a producing unit and he felt that here was a tangible indication of progress, no matter how slight.

"It's pretty tough, though, Dan," he said with mock regretfulness. "Here I've been at the studio

lots longer than you, and yet on this trip I have to take orders from you."

"Why, how's that?"

"You're assistant director, and I'm only here as property-man. Now, do you think that's fair?"

The question was answered in an unexpected way, and one that gave Eddie food for thought, by Hal Curtis, who was sitting with them and who had been listening with amused interest to the conversation between these two ambitious youngsters.

"It certainly *is* fair, Eddie," he said. "I don't care how long you've *been* at the studio, you haven't *worked* there as long as Dan by several weeks. Why, I never knew you were on the payroll until a short time ago. I thought you were just a hanger-on that did odd jobs once in a while for the privilege of hanging around. You were just so much dead-wood, Eddie, and I guess you were no worse than lots of others, at that. I know you weren't in earnest in what you said just now, but don't ever deceive yourself into thinking that you've been working at the studio longer than Dan, for you haven't. You're a new hand, that's what you are. And," he added sincerely, "for the last few weeks you've been developing into a mighty good one. I'll tell you a little secret: Charlie Goldberg's got his eye on you."

Eddie had felt uncomfortable during the first of this speech, and not a little injured, for in spite of the fact that he knew it to be true he was inclined

to resent Hal's frankness in publishing the facts. But when Hal complimented his improvement he realized that he was utterly sincere in his words and meant them only constructively.

And his eye brightened at the reference to Charlie Goldberg. Eddie realized the limitation of his talents and, having a sense of the artistic in his make-up, as well as a natural mechanical bent, he had found himself drawn with a strong interest towards the camera-man's art. With the object of satisfying this interest in view he had—unnoticed, he thought—spent much of his spare time in watching MacQuarrie's chief "crank-twister" at his work. He rejoiced now when Curtis's words told him that his efforts had not gone unobserved but had attracted a favourable interest from Goldberg.

Dan Dixon, on the other hand, was beginning to worry. After all, what qualifications did he have for an assistant-directorship? His knowledge of picture-producing was limited to what he had been able to pick up by observation and much questioning during his few weeks at the studio. That, to be sure, was no inconsiderable amount. But when he compared it to the amount that one should know to be able to handle an executive position like—well, say MacQuarrie's—he realized that he was, indeed, the rankest novice.

He had sense enough to know that the circumstances under which he had been elevated to his new position afforded him no guarantee of its permanence. He knew that Hammerson's particular de-

linquency and general inefficiency had left an opening on MacQuarrie's staff that must be filled; that MacQuarrie was too busy to go out and look for the right kind of a man; but that he probably felt that he would repay Dan for securing a desirable location by giving him a chance for a few days. But when Dixon came right down to serious thought it looked as though even Hammerson had an advantage over him. For Hugh was certainly familiar, in a general way at least, with the duties of the position. The more he thought of it, the more troubled he became. It would be hard to fall down now after such a good start.

"How do you feel about your new job, Dan?" asked Hal Curtis as the train started up again with a jolt after stopping to let off a passenger at a small way-station.

It was as though he had read Dan's thoughts, so accurately did his question hit the bull's-eye of his young friend's meditations. As a matter of fact he had divined something of what his companion had been thinking about from the anxiety and earnestness of his expression.

"Well, to tell the truth, Hal, I feel just a little bit—serious. I wish you'd tell me just what you think. Do you think I can handle the job? I don't know much about it, you know."

"I'll be frank with you, old man. That's just what I was thinking too. For your own sake I would rather you didn't get this chance for a few months' more, at least, until you have had more

experience in the business. Many's the man, you know, who has failed in life just because he tackled a bigger job before he was equipped by training to handle it. If he had waited until he had the training, he would have put it over and been ready to tackle the next bigger job. But as it was, he fell back to where he started from, and grew so discouraged from the fact that he had failed once that he never had the nerve to try again. And if I wasn't so dead sure of you, Dan," he added earnestly, "I would wish in my heart that you would fail now! For if there is anything that does a fellow more harm than failure, it's success that comes too quickly or too easily. But I know that success will never turn a head as level as yours."

Dan pondered for some minutes over the other's words. They sounded strange, falling from lips so little older than his own. But Hal Curtis, for all of his youth and boyishness, was a deep thinker and a shrewd observer, and he drew conclusions on life and its conduct that, back in his college days, were wont to startle his professors with the accuracy of his deductions and the pithy truth of his conclusions. He had watched Dan and Eddie for some time now and he was keenly interested in the effect that the former's friendship was having on the latter. And he had come to know the two boys better—much better than they even guessed.

"But Hal," objected Dan after a few minutes' thought, "if I didn't take this chance I might never get another. And besides, Mr. MacQuarrie didn't

ask me whether I'd take it or not. He just took it for granted that I would."

"Are you sure that was the way of it, Dan?" the actor smiled. "It strikes me that it was you yourself who forced the issue the day before yesterday afternoon when you so musically notified Mac that the fates had sent you in answer to his prayer!"

Dan laughed, a trifle embarrassed, and Eddie grinned appreciatively at this gentle "nudge in the ribs" at Dan's nerve.

"Fellows," declared Dan emphatically, "I had no more idea of what I was doing than if I had been unconscious. And I didn't know what it was all about until I got outside the studio. And then I was scared for fear I wouldn't make good my boast to Mr. MacQuarrie. I feel something like that now," he added, a note of anxiety creeping back into his voice. "Why, Hammerson knew heaps more about this job than I do! And he didn't make good."

"Hammerson," interposed Hal quickly, "also knew—or was supposed to know—heaps more about location-finding than you. And yet you succeeded where he had failed. And besides, you know, Hammerson's failure to make good was not caused by what he knew or didn't know, but by what he couldn't do or wouldn't do. He was yellow—that was all. And I really don't think you need to worry, Dan, for 'Work' seems to be your middle name. And that's the quality that appeals to the Chief more than anything else. He'll give you a chance to pick up everything else you need."

Dixon saw nothing of MacQuarrie for a couple of hours after they boarded the train. The director had hied himself to a seat near the forward end of the coach and busied himself, as usual, with his manuscripts and notes. But his assistant kept an eye on the back of his head as it showed over the top of the seat, in anticipation of a possible summons.

The summons came when they had covered about half of the distance to their destination, and Dan jumped up so quickly to respond that he nearly upset Eddie Jordan, beside whom he had been sitting. When he arrived at MacQuarrie's side, the latter didn't even favour him with a glance. He merely moved over to the further end of the seat and motioned Dan to sit beside him.

"How do you think the chances will be of blowing up the Haunted Hut, Dixon?" he asked abruptly.

"Not very good, I'm afraid," answered Dan. "I don't know as Mr. Meacham would dare go to those lengths. Is it necessary to destroy it?"

"No-o-o, not exactly necessary. But the script calls for a scene in which a fanatic throws a bomb at the cabin. Of course a fake bomb full of flash powder will photograph just as well, and it will be a whole lot safer, at that. I guess we'll let well enough alone and not bother smashing things up. Did you send off all those telegrams I told you to before we got on the train?"

"Yes, sir."

"Okay!"

That was MacQuarrie's final stamp of completion

on a conversation, so Dan returned to his original seat. Just before the train pulled into the East Quimby station the director beckoned to him again. "Now if those wagons you wired for meet us all-right, you see that the trunks are hauled to the hotel and put in a separate room at once. Have Jordan open them up and tell the people to dress right away while lunch is being prepared. You take the folks right to the hotel. Did you make reservations?"

"I got a kind of an option on the whole place yesterday and I telegraphed the proprietor this morning how many rooms we'd need."

"That's all right then. Now while we're eating you find out from that bank man if he squared it with the owner of the property for us to use it, and then see that some kind of a conveyances are ready to take us all to the location right after lunch. Here's the call-sheet and prop.-plot for this afternoon. Get busy!"

Dan jumped off the train before it stopped and by the time MacQuarrie reached the platform he had a truck backed up to the door of the baggage car and was superintending the unloading of the trunks.

"Eddie!" he called, as Jordan stepped from the train. "Will you stay with the trunks while I take the folks to the hotel?"

"Sure, pop!" Eddie was eager to help his friend by placing himself as far as he was able absolutely at his service. "And when they're loaded I'll see that they're taken right up to the hotel, so you won't

have to bother about them. You'll have enough other things to do, old boy!"

"Much obliged, Eddie!"

And Dixon, with eyes shining happily, leaped down from the truck to take up his other duties.

MacQuarrie, apparently, just stood there and did nothing. In truth, though, his keen eyes were following Dan's every move and he turned away, after a while, with a satisfied look.

"If it will only last!" he murmured.

Within an hour, so well had Dan left his arrangements the day before, the baggage had been delivered, the company registered at Peebles' Inn, lunch partaken of, and those performers whose names appeared on the call-sheet for the afternoon costumed and made-up for their work.

Dan went over the "property-plot," or list of properties that would be required for the scenes to be taken that afternoon, with Eddie, and packing the required articles into a trunk, loaded it under the seat of one of the wagons for which he had arranged to convey the performers to the location.

An interview with Banker Meacham brought out the fact that that worthy had not yet had an opportunity to deliver his ultimatum to Black Brian.

"But I'll go along with you," he announced. "We'll drive up in my car. There's room for seven, so invite some of your folks to come with us."

And so it happened that when the little caravan of trucks and haywagons started up the winding road that led to Manitou Falls, it was headed by the

banker's big red touring-car, in which rode Dan, MacQuarrie, Eddie, Hal Curtis, and Charlie Goldberg.

It seemed as though the entire population of East Quimby had turned out to welcome and review the procession. And their curiosity did not go unrewarded. For those of the company who were to work during the afternoon were in complete "regalia," and speculation was rife among the onlookers as to the type of character each performer was dressed to represent. And indeed, so widespread is the publicity of the screen that many of the citizens of both sexes recognized some of the actors from their pictured effigies, with which they were evidently quite familiar, and these were not at all backward in hailing their idols by their proper names. Hal Curtis in particular, to his own embarrassment and his companions' amusement, was the target for many familiar salutations.

One incident added a pleasant touch of humour to the trip. It happened just as the cavalcade was passing the blacksmith's shop out at the edge of the town. Hearing unaccustomed sounds outside, the smith, a husky, leather-aproned individual, appeared at the door. He surveyed the parade for a moment and then his eye fell on Curtis. A surprised look came over his face and then, deciding that his eyes had not deceived him, he strode up to the red auto, and without so much as "by your leave" stepped on the running board and extended his hairy paw.

"Hal Curtis, put 'er thar!"

Hal, rather abashed at the suddenness of the greeting, complied with the hearty request and suffered his hand to be wrung vigorously by the eager blacksmith.

"But say," continued the native lowering his voice and totally disregarding the black looks with which Meacham was favouring him for causing the car to list considerably to one side by his over-balancing weight, "I'd like to ask you a question. Can you come down and leave these folks for a minute or so?"

"Why do you want me to do that?" asked Hal, who had quite recovered his poise by this time and was thoroughly enjoying the situation. "Can't you ask me before them?"

"Wal, I dunno," was the rather doubtful response. "Be they good friends o' yourn?"

"Every one of them," replied Hal soberly.

The blacksmith looked them over gravely for a moment and then turned his attentions back to Hal.

"Wal, I s'pose it's all right if you say so. But I jes' got to ask you, Hal, whatever did become of that cross-eyed feller, Steve Barlow, after you throwed him off the cliff inter the river in 'The Clansman's Bride' last week? Was he drowned?"

It was all that Hal and his companions could do to refrain from hearty outbursts of laughter at the gullibility of this innocent son of nature to whom Hal's recent photo-play had been so real an experience that he even felt a lively interest in the after

lives of the characters. But by an effort Hal composed himself and answered kindly:

"No, my friend, he was saved."

"And did he reform?" persisted the inquisitor.

"Yes. He turned over a new leaf, and he's doing much better now."

The blacksmith looked relieved and satisfied.

"Gosh! Ain't that nice, now?" he wanted to know. "But I knowed from the very fust-off that he wa'n't all bad. Gorry, but what a wallop you did give him, though!"

And with another admiring glance he dropped off the running-board and strode back in the direction of his shop as unceremoniously as he had come.

Hal was the victim of much good-natured bantering on account of this incident from all but MacQuarrie. A soft light shone in the director's eyes and he said, a little later:

"What a wonderful vocation it is, at that, to create things that are so real and living that they take people right out of themselves and transport them to another world!"

"Quite right," agreed Hal. "But do you know, Mr. MacQuarrie, that the faculty of my college were inclined to scoff at me for taking up this work? And when I returned to the old school on a visit a while ago the president started to take me to task for giving my time up to frivolous things, instead of practising law or medicine, or some other profession."

"Yes? And what did you tell him?" MacQuarrie leaned forward a bit to catch the answer.

"I told him," said Hal with a humorous quirk, but a bit proudly, "that, while the doctors made their living out of the ills of humanity and the lawyers made theirs out of men's fights and wrangles, we in this profession have the satisfaction of knowing that our livelihood is made by giving happiness and entertainment to the millions!"

"Good!" exclaimed MacQuarrie approvingly as he settled back in his seat again. "I wouldn't call that a slam at the other professions, but it's a mighty good defence of our own."

After that conversation died down to an occasional exclamation at the beauties of some particularly rare bit of landscape as it came within their range of vision. The touring-car was some distance ahead of the wagons for a while, as the sturdy draft horses insisted upon maintaining their plodding, even gait up the inclined trail. But the increasing roughness of the road began to show its effect on the speed of the car before long and it finally settled down to a jolting pace that was not much speedier than that of the vehicles it was leading.

No one seemed to mind, however, for the splendour of the scenery was full recompense for time lost in transit. MacQuarrie, as usual, was not wasting a minute. He frequently whipped out his notebook and dashed off a sketch of some particularly attractive piece of woodland or meadow, the

composition of which appealed to him, and whose outline he wanted to file away for future reference.

"Dixon," he declared enthusiastically as they neared the end of the journey, "you did something worth while when you found this territory. It's the most beautiful country I've seen in a long time! I had no idea such scenery existed anywhere around here. There are enough locations within a couple of miles of here, according to what I've seen so far, to keep a company busy for a month. Look over there!" He pointed off to the valley below them where a branch of the Little Rocky River wound its way through a beautiful meadow in the middle of which nestled a cozy white farmhouse. "I want you to find just how to get into that meadow, Dixon, and get permission for us to shoot some scenes there. That's one of the places we need. Why, I never dreamed that—"

"Stop whar ye be, or I'll plug ye!"

Meacham jumped at the sound of the coarse growling voice and threw out his clutch and jammed on the foot-brake so suddenly that as slow as the car had been going, he was nearly thrown headlong through the wind-shield.

Black Brian, in all his towering length stood, legs widespread, in the middle of the road before them. In his right hand was a long double-barrelled shotgun, so rusted that it failed to reflect the bright rays of the noonday sun. He held it with apparent carelessness, but its muzzle was directed full at Meacham's head, its hammer at full cock, and his

finger caressed the trigger in a significant way. One glance at the ferocious eyes that burned beneath their shaggy brows was convincing evidence that Black Brian was horribly in earnest.

"You young brat, you!" He pointed a gnarled forefinger at Dan. "Don't you move! I've got you now, and I'm goin' to finish the job I started yesterday! Didn't you hear me tell you not to dare show your face around my property ag'in? S'pose you thought I didn't mean it, eh? Thought I'd fergit? Thought you could come up there an' chop trees down and—" He stopped and peered at Meacham again as if trying to recognize him. "That ain't you, is it, Mister Meacham?"

"It certainly is, Brian," answered the banker sternly. "And I want to know what you mean by all these monkey-shines?"

"Wal, 'll tell yuh, Mister Meacham,"—the giant seemed quite ill at ease now, all of a sudden, and unostentatiously brought the point of his gun down towards the ground—"this here young feller said he was goin' to chop trees down on my land an' that he was goin' ter bring a lot of people ter trespass an' raise Ole Ned around here an' I told him he jes' couldn't do it, and he can't! An' then yestiddy afternoon somebody snook around while I was up at th' North Forty and they started cuttin' down a big birch on th' north bank o' th' Falls. Somethin' must 'a' skeered 'em away, though, 'cause they left it jes' whar 't fell, half in an' half out o' th' water. So when people carries on sech high-handed pro-

ceedin's I'm yere t' stop 'em from goin' no further. You've got t' take these people back, Mister Meacham."

"Is that so?" retorted the banker. He reached into his inside coat pocket and drew out a long folded document one end of which bore a flaming red seal. Black Brian's uneasiness seemed to increase at the sight of this weapon. "Got any money, Brian?"

"'Fraid I ain't, Mister Meacham. But I'll have it in a day or two," he added hastily.

"Umm. Quite a little overdue, isn't it?"

"'Fraid so," mumbled the big, black-bearded fellow.

"You know what that gives me the right to do, don't you?"

The landowner said nothing, but lowered his gaze and Meacham continued, just a little ironically:

"Now don't you think it would be nice of you, Brian, if you were to withdraw your objections and let these friends of mine trespass on your property? 'As far as that tree is concerned, you know, you can't touch them for that, anyway. I had that done myself. What do you think?"

Brian scratched his head and then gave Meacham a sly, calculating look.

"Kin you wait ontell th' first o' th' month fer thet int'rurst money, Mister Meacham?" he asked as though laying down the terms of an understanding.

"Wouldn't surprise me if I could, Brian," smiled the banker cordially. "Can you see your way

clear to let these folks use your land for a few days?"

Black Brian twisted his heavy lips into a slow grin.

"Wouldn't surprise me none ef I could, Mister Meacham," he responded, "seein' 's how they're friends o' yourn."

This last obstacle being removed, the company soon disembarked and, led by Dixon, found their way through the woods to Manitou Falls. They found the tree fallen properly, and as everything else more than satisfied MacQuarrie's expectations, it was less than a quarter of an hour after they arrived that his voice rang out into the woods,

"Ready! Action! Camera!"

And work was under way.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

HAMMERSON GETS BUSY

IT was several days later that the train that rolled into East Quimby at half-past ten in the morning deposited Hugh Hammerson on the little station platform. He had spent many hours in planning various ways of accomplishing his vengeance, but none of them seemed quite satisfactory. It was one thing, he found, to swear to "get even" and quite another to find a way to do it.

But at last Porter, of the Consolidated, with whom he had had a couple of more interviews, had suggested that Hugh place himself in the neighbourhood where the company was working, on the chance that something might turn up to his advantage—some circumstance of which he might otherwise be unable to avail himself. So he had come.

And now as he strolled carelessly and with just a hint of his old swagger down the main street, he wondered how in the world he was going to pass his time in this "dead joint," as he contemptuously characterized the village, while waiting for the fates to take a hand. Just at present he wasn't afraid to show himself on the street. Later, though, when the sun got down, he would keep himself out of sight. For then the company would be coming back

to the village from wherever they were working and he didn't care to have them know of his presence. The less they knew, the less they'd suspect.

He hunted up lodgings in a cottage on the outskirts of the town near the blacksmith's shop, and then, after washing the dust of the trip from his face and hands and changing his collar, he sauntered down the street again to kill time.

After strolling the length of the village and back, he turned into Meacham's grocery store, for want of something better to do, intending to purchase some chocolates, of which he had noticed a somewhat appetizing display in a corner of the show-window.

It chanced that A. K. Meacham himself had just been looking over the books of his store and was on the point of leaving when he saw Hugh enter. He assumed, at first glance, that this must be a member of the motion-picture company who was not working that day for some reason, and decided to engage him in conversation, with a view to finding out how much longer the company expected to remain in the vicinity. So waving the clerk back he advanced to wait on him personally.

He weighed out the candy and, as he opened the till to make change, he smiled affably.

"How's the picture coming along?"

Hugh knew at once, of course, what he was referring to, but it pleased him to profess ignorance.

"Picture?" he asked. "What picture?"

"Why, aren't you one of the actors that are

working for the moving pictures up at Manitou Falls?"

"Who, me? I guess not!" he answered, with an air that was fully intended to be supercilious, but failed by quite a little. But he saw possibilities in this conversation, and decided to prolong it. "How long have they been around here?" he inquired.

"Why, it's pretty near a week now, I guess.

"Pretty near a week, eh? Anything missing yet?" he asked meaningly.

"Missing? How do you mean?" Meacham was all interest now, and he leaned over the counter expectantly. If there was anything wrong with those moving-picture folks he wanted to find it out, for he felt responsible for bringing them to East Quimby. Of course, he reflected with satisfaction, they didn't owe *him* anything. They paid cash for everything they bought at his store, and that was plenty, too. But still, you never could tell about some folks, and it's just as well to find out what you can. "What did you expect would be missing?"

"Oh, nothing," answered Hugh with a great show of indifference. "Nothing at all. What's the name of the company. Do they use one?"

"Kitson, I believe," the banker answered a trifle impatiently. There was something disturbing about this fellow's rather impudent questions, he thought. "Do you know anything about them?"

"Kitson! Not the Kirk Kitson Pictures Corporation, from Fort Lee, New Jersey?" Hugh demanded, affecting to be startled at the name.

"That sounds like the name they gave all right. Why?"

"Humph! Is there a fellow with them by the name of MacQuarrie, and one named Dixon?"

"Why, yes, I don't know but what both of those gentlemen are with them."

"Gentlemen!" scoffed Hugh. "That makes me laugh!"

"Why, I don't understand. I transacted a little—er—business with Mr. Dixon, and I thought he was a right clever young man."

"I guess he is! What business did you do with him?"

"I arranged to get permission for them to use a piece of property up the river. Why?" Meacham was getting nettled now. The conversation wasn't going at all to his liking. Up to date, he was giving all the information and getting none. And this stranger's hints were certainly disquieting.

"And how much did they give you for that? Not much, I'll bet!"

"Why, no, of course not. They didn't give me anything. Should they have?"

"I should say they should! Every *honest* company always pays for things like that," Hammerson lied glibly. "Why, that was worth a couple of hundred dollars to them, at least. And I'll bet that young thief of a Dixon pocketed the money himself!"

He watched Meacham closely as he fired this shot, and he saw that it registered a clean hit. And

then, having produced the required effect, he looked at his watch, professed to being in a great hurry, pocketed his candy and made off, chuckling to himself as he went.

Banker Meacham's neck and ears slowly turned a dull red. That young Dixon had put it over on him! Of course it was too late to do anything now, for his store was certainly making a profit from the company and he didn't want to lose it. But he gulped down Hammerson's bait, hook, line, and sinker, and it made him hot to feel, as he did now, that he had been swindled out of two hundred dollars by a mere boy. Well, he'd have to swallow his humiliation and forget it. But he'd like to see that young scamp trick him again!

Progress was rapid on the scenes that were being made around East Quimby and MacQuarrie was well satisfied. He telegraphed a report of each day's work to Kitson, and at last he felt that he had reached the point where they were practically out of danger, and that "Flames of Conquest" would assuredly be ready for delivery to Manuel Herrera and the others who held release date contracts on October fifteenth—unless some unforeseen disaster were to befall.

As for Dan Dixon, he was all enthusiasm over his new position. He no longer feared his ability to make good for he had no time for such fears. He was on the go at daybreak and he never thought of retiring at night until everything was all ready for the following day's work. He was developing into

a perfect dynamo of energy, and he seemed to thrive on the activities to which he gave himself so wholeheartedly.

He felt now that he had really found himself, and he set about mastering the details of his position in a truly workmanlike manner. All the while he kept one eye on MacQuarrie, and watched intently as the director supervised the rehearsing and filming of each scene. He already had a good practical idea of camera-work from his reading, and he found Charlie Goldberg only too willing to supplement his knowledge from his own great store of experience, and many were the questions that he answered on the long rides to and from Manitou Falls.

Goldberg had fitted up a regular laboratory at the Inn, where, each night, he developed the product of the day's work. And a portable projection set enabled him to run off the film for MacQuarrie each morning.

Thus it was that the trip to East Quimby marked a big step in Dan's education. Eddie, too, presented himself regularly whenever anything pertaining to the work of a camera-man was being done. And it was not long before he was allowed to turn the crank on those scenes on which two cameras were trained, as is frequently the case where the action is of such a difficult or otherwise peculiar nature that it is not desirable to repeat it. In such cases the chances of bad photography are minimized by shooting the same action simultaneously with two cameras.

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cameras. And Eddie also began to feel that he was making tangible progress.

As the days passed, Hugh Hammerson began to grow nervous and fidgety. He was accomplishing nothing. His desire for revenge had not weakened in the least; indeed, on the contrary, the fact that no opportunity for the accomplishment of his ends presented itself only intensified his bitter craving, and he was beginning to chafe under a sense of helplessness.

He had nightly conferences with Joe Morrison in his boarding-house room, and made the simple-minded fellow go over the events of the day very carefully for him, and drew out of the shallow brain every little detail that might offer the suggestion he was seeking.

"It's going to be a great picture all right, I guess," Joe remarked one night as he deposited his weight on Hugh's bed. Hugh rolled and lighted a cigarette by the window through which, bathed in the mellow moonlight, the road up Mount Manitou was clearly visible. "There's going to be a lot of good stuff in it. I heard MacQuarrie say that the finish was going to be the greatest fire effect that was ever seen."

Hammerson whirled around from the window.

"Where are they going to take it?" he demanded. "Here, or in Jersey?"

"Neither—out on the coast. They say they're building a great big set out there for it now. But we're taking *some* good stuff here, though," he

added. "Mac said he'd be ready to rehearse the bomb scene in another couple of days. That'll be the last thing he'll shoot up here, I guess. Probably go back to the studio and get ready for the trip to the coast right after he gets it."

Hammerson took a deep inhale of the cigarette smoke, and seating himself in the rocker beside the bed, leaned forward a little. He thought he had detected possibilities in one of his companion's statements.

"What's the bomb scene going to be, Joe? Tell me about it."

"Why, I don't know much about it, Hugh. All I understand is that there's going to be a scene where 'Red' Reagan creeps out of some bushes and heaves a big bomb at Louis Contrell, just when he's coming out of the cabin door. O' course they'll use a prop. 'flash' bomb but I guess MacQuarrie and Goldberg are working up some trick photography effects that'll be a hit."

Hammerson's eyes narrowed shrewdly. His brain was working with unaccustomed smoothness now. The possibilities that he had detected were developing.

"I see. Yes, that ought to be good, all right. We'll have something like that in *our* first picture when I make you a star, eh, Joey old boy?"

The poor innocent blushed with pleasure at the thought that the insinuating Hammerson was suggesting to his immatured brain. Hugh felt that it was time to work on Joe now, as he might want to

use him in the scheme that was forming itself in his crafty imagination.

"Sure! That'll be great! And will you let me throw the bomb in our picture, Hugh?"

"You bet I will, Joe! And we'll have just the same kind of a bomb that MacQuarrie's going to use. What's it look like, do you know?"

"Yes—I saw Eddie Jordan showing it to Dan Dixon in the prop.-room over at the hotel. It looks like an iron baseball, and there's a little screw place where they put the flash-powder in, and it all comes apart easy so when it hits anything it'll fly to pieces like it was blown up by real powder. Can we get one like that, do you s'pose, Hugh?"

"Sure. I know a fellow that makes them. He'll get us one when I tell him what it's for, all right. He'll be glad to. Let's see, now, when did you say MacQuarrie was going to take the bomb scene?"

"I don't know, exactly, Hugh. But I guess it'll perhaps be day after tomorrow, or the day after that, anyway."

"I see."

Hugh got up on his feet, yawned, and stretched. It was pretence, and quite unnecessary, for his companion was not mentally equipped to be suspicious. But Hugh was beginning to enjoy the rôle of arch-conspirator, and he liked to put in all the effects he had read about.

"How'd you like to come for a little drive, Joe? I've got a headache, and the air up in the hills might

do it good. I'll get a horse and buggy from the landlady. Come along?"

"You bet!"

Joe would have started for the moon just then if Hugh had suggested it. But Hugh had no designs on the moon. He had suddenly made up his mind that he wanted to get into telephonic communication with a certain suite of offices in New York City. And he thought it would be wiser to put the call in from one of the neighbouring towns than from East Quimby. Hence his quickly developed headache and the subsequent craving for fresh air.

As the little chestnut mare pulled them over the moonlit roads Hammerson was silent. He didn't seem to appreciate the air now, for he constantly filled his lungs with cigarette smoke. He was thinking, and thinking hard. Indeed, if Douglas MacQuarrie, who had so frequently declared that his former assistant was without any brains whatever, could have known the use to which those brains were being put, he would have been surprised, to say the least. And could he have known the intensity of the hatred that was actuating their use, he might have been disturbed. He would have been on his guard, at any rate.

Porter was alone in his office that night when the long-distance call came through. He listened to Hammerson's mysterious request and, after a moment's deliberation, assented. After the toll connection had been taken down he released the receiver

hook, which he had been holding in place with his forefinger, and called Bellamy's club.

"Hammerson just 'phoned in from up-state," he announced when his partner's voice spoke over the wire. "He wants me to send him some explosive powder right away by express."

"Explosive powder! What's he want that for?"

"Don't know. He wouldn't tell. Afraid some one would overhear, I suppose. But he says he'll guarantee to get results if we'll get the stuff up to him. What do you think?"

"I don't know. Sounds pretty dangerous, doesn't it?"

"Sure! But that's his funeral. We won't appear in it."

"We might if you send it by express."

"Then I'll send it by messenger."

There was a few seconds of silence and then Bellamy's voice concluded.

"All right. Suit yourself. But—Hello!—Listen! Be sure to send some one you can trust. Have him get off at the station before East Quimby, arrange for Hammerson to meet him there and take the stuff off him and then have him come right back to New York on the next train. Get the idea?"

"Right!"

Porter hung up the receiver and rubbed his hands together in a satisfied manner.

Perhaps this big young fellow with the grudge against the Kitson outfit would accomplish some-

thing after all! At any rate, the Consolidated couldn't lose much.

The next day was a busy one at the Manitou Falls location. MacQuarrie was anxious to complete as much as possible that day so that but little would remain for the next, when he planned to film the bombing scene and then be off to the studio again.

Day had hardly broken when the caravan of wagons wound up the trail and the company picked its way through the strip of woodland that separated the falls of the Little Rocky from the road. Preparations for work were soon finished and MacQuarrie had rehearsed three different bits of action before the light was right for shooting.

When the sun had lifted itself to sufficient height, work began in earnest and was pushed without interruption until the pangs of hunger began to make themselves felt. And then only enough time was taken to eat a cold snack and wash it down with copious draughts drawn from the swift-flowing stream.

Hal Curtis pretended to object to this curtailment of the noon-hour.

"I really can't allow this to happen again, Mr. MacQuarrie," he declared with an injured air. "You are deliberately preventing Dixon, Jordan, and myself from having our daily game of ball, and such proceedings are not to be tolerated. I will have to ask you, in the future, to refrain from letting your business interfere with my pleasure!"

"I'll see to it that it doesn't occur again, Mr. Curtis," responded the director with an exaggerated air of repentance. "And I'll ask Mr. Kitson to compensate you in some way for your sacrifice. Perhaps he'll let us work nights hereafter, just so you and your pals can play all day." And the next instant, megaphone to his lips, he was calling imperatively, "Positions!"

But no one minded, for they were with MacQuarrie, heart and soul, and, strict though he was with them and grinding perfection into their every gesture and expression, they recognized the man's genius and knew that he would reflect glory upon them when the masterpiece would find its way to the screens of the world.

So well did they work that, by the time the light began to wane, all was done but the scene in which the bomb was to be thrown. And this it was decided to defer until the following morning, to catch the better light. Time was taken, however, to run through several rehearsals of the scene before quitting for the day. "Red" Reagan was shown the proper manner in which to crawl out of the bushes a few yards from the cabin and taught to time himself so as to throw the bomb just as Louis Contrell made his appearance in the doorway. Then, after Dixon had assured MacQuarrie that there was a plentiful supply of flash-powder in the property-room at the Inn, Reagan was permitted to try out the bomb, throwing it, as directed, at the spot where Contrell would stand. As it landed, the per-

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"Neither—out on the coast. They say they're building a great big set out there for it now. But we're taking *some* good stuff here, though," he

Stores were planning to close for the day and the selectmen had even instructed the school committee to give the pupils a holiday that they might get a little education from a practical source.

Indeed, it was a real gala occasion; and when MacQuarrie headed his "troop of light artillery," as Hal Curtis had dubbed the daily procession, up the hill that morning an hour after sunrise, they were followed by a motley line of carriages, buggies, sulkies, carry-alls, haywagons, dump-carts and even baby-carriages, which were trundled up the rough trail by broad-shouldered, deep-chested farm-hands who were paying this price to their employers for this day off in the middle of the season.

All ages were represented in the merry parade, from babes in arms to a popular old character known to the populace as "the General," who admitted ninety years, and whose favourite indoor sport was narrating to unsuspecting strangers, with amazing liveliness of gesture and expression, the harrowing details of the many battles he had fought in the Civil War. Investigation once proved that the General had participated in a number of battles which have not yet been fought. But that did not curb his enthusiasm for war-talk.

The General presented a ludicrous appearance in the procession. He was dressed in what he insisted upon calling his "union suit," by which he innocently meant the Civil War uniform on the Union forces. The component parts of the outfit, however, were recognized as salvaged bits of lodge regalia that had

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belonged to several of the General's neighbours. He had harnessed his weary-looking plough-horse, who struggled valiantly under the name of "Genevieve," to a shiny, brand new racing sulky which he had just won at a raffle, and in which he sat with skinny legs, clothed in brown homespun, dangling out of each side, while in his lap reposed a huge stone jug and a flat circular bundle which could only be a pie. It was evident that the General had no intention of starving on the field.

And so it was with many a laugh and merry quip between the villagers and visitors that the happy crowd moved slowly up the hill.

CHAPTER TWELVE

FIGHTING THROUGH!

“**W**ELL, Eddie,” suggested Dan after the last available property had been packed and the lock snapped on the last full trunk, “suppose you see if you can dig up a horse and wagon some place and we’ll get these full trunks down to the station and check them. Then that much will be out of the way.”

“No use!” Eddie shook his head. “There was a travelling man down in the office just now when I came up that’s been trying to hire a horse for the last two hours, and he tells me that there isn’t a rig of any kind to be had in town. They’re all up at the location, watching the gang take pictures, you know.”

“That’s right, too. I didn’t think of that. Well, we’ll have plenty of time when they get back. Train doesn’t go out until three-forty. But what we *can* do is go through all the rooms and see that nobody’s left anything after them. We’ll do this floor first. You start on the east wing and I’ll start at the south end of this corridor.”

They parted at the door of the property-room and started the final tour of inspection. There were but half a dozen rooms in Dan’s wing, so after he had

finished with them he started down the long corridor and worked towards his companion.

In one room, the second in that wing, his attention was attracted to a little pile of light greyish dust. He was about to pass it by, but on second thought he stooped and, picking a little of it up, rubbed it between his fingers and smelled of it. A puzzled look crossed his countenance and hurrying to the open window he put a few grains of the substance on the sill, stood off at arms length and held a lighted match to it.

A miniature flash of brilliant white light, and a cloud of smoke swept out through the open window.

His suspicions were confirmed—it was flash-powder!

For a moment Dan failed to attach the true significance to his discovery. Why any one in the company would have flash-powder in his room was beyond his understanding. And this particular powder, he happened to know, was not for sale, but was a special brand which MacQuarrie had made up for himself.

The more Dan thought of it, the more puzzling it seemed. It was a little thing, to be sure, and might mean nothing. But he felt that it did mean something. He glanced at the number on the door and referring to his notebook learned that the room had been occupied by Joe Morrison.

He was about to dismiss the subject from his mind and continue his examination of the room when his eye fell on a small oblong can on the floor back of

the door. Prompted by some strange impulse he stooped quickly, and picking it up, took one look at the label.

It was marked, in big letters, "T. N. T.," under which was inscribed in smaller type, "Tri-nitrotoluol—Handle with extreme care! High explosive!"

Dan gasped and went white as the full meaning of this new evidence flooded over him. Some one, apparently though inconceivably Joe Morrison, had stolen the imitation bomb from the property-room during the night, removed the harmless flash-powder, and loaded it with this most powerful of high explosives, the dreaded T. N. T.! And that bomb, now no longer a mere harmless prop. but converted into a deadly engine of destruction, was somewhere up near Manitou Falls, waiting to be thrown by "Red" Reagan at Louis Contrell!

Dan stood rooted to the spot with horror as he pictured the devastation that would be wrought. A charge of that size—for the entire can had been emptied—would be enough to kill any one within a radius of many yards when it exploded. And the scene was to be photographed close at hand. Scores of the townspeople would be crowded around in back of the camera and—it was all too horrible to contemplate.

He heard Eddie enter a nearby room and close the door. But this was no time for explanations—*this was a time when action was needed, and needed badly!*

With an inarticulate cry he leaped through the

door, flew around the corner of the corridor, down the stairs and through the deserted hotel office out into the middle of the road.

Wildly he looked right and left, but not a vehicle of any description was to be seen, and he groaned with anguish as he recalled Eddie's words. For he could never make it on foot up that steep and deep-guttered mountain trail in time to prevent the impending catastrophe—if, indeed, it was not already too late!

When the joint party of actors and villagers descended from their various styles of conveyances and started through the woods, happiness and wholesome enjoyment comprised the keynote of the occasion. The company itself felt happy because the day, it was confidently expected, would mark the completion of another step in the production which was to be such a great contribution to the art of the silent drama. And the country-folks were happy with the happiness of eager anticipation of the novel sights they were to witness. A smile seemed to rest on every lip and all seemed to look for a chance to break into laughter.

The fun began as they were yet on the roadside. The General was having difficulty in getting out of his sulky. Could he have used his hands, he would have made it easily. But one bony claw was tightly gripping the handle of his jug and the other was equally engaged, with more or less grace, in balancing the pie. And the old plough-horse, ignoring her

master's none too courteous commands, was roaming casually along step by step, enticed by the tender morsels of grass that grew by the side of the road. Each time the General would lift a cautious foot, the mare would innocently take a step and jerk the light sulky just enough to bounce her master back into his seat and send his feet sprawling out again as he wildly waved the jug and the pie.

"Whoa, Genevivvy!" he yelled, and, as the horse turned her shaggy head and aimed a baleful eye at him, he ejaculated, "Gol durn ye! Cain't ye stay whoa'd a minit till a feller gits aout o' his coach? Now try, ye pesky critter!"

But Genevieve at this moment became interested in her appetite for toothsome delicacies again, with the result that the old warrior suffered another jolt.

"Lemme take yer bundles, Gin'ral," offered a gawky-looking farm-hand whose red tie rivalled in resplendence the flaming hues of the scarlet tanager that flitted through the road-bordering trees with apparent enjoyment of the old fellow's discomfiture.

"Not by a durn sight, Tad Peters! I wouldn't trust yew with a jug th 'day yew wuz borned, an' ye've bin a-gettin' worse ever sense. Git outa my way! Whoa, thar, GENEVIVVY!"

It isn't possible to imagine how he expected to get out of his sulky, for he flippantly refused all offers of aid of which he received not a few, until Big Bill Hardy, the powerful blacksmith who had accosted Hal Curtis so familiarly on the first day of the trip, saw his plight and came over to him.

"What seems t' be th' trouble, Gen'ral?" he asked kindly.

"Genevivvy won't stand still an' 'tain't nobody's bizniz but hern an' mine, Bill Hardy, an' don't yew go t' buttin' in t' whut ain't none o' yore affair no-how!"

"Right you are, Gen'ral. Better fergit it an' lemme give you a lift, though, 'fore Genevieve hauls yew t' th' top o' th' mountain an' skids down t'other side, eh?"

He held out his hairy paw but the independent old man would have none of it.

"Bill Hardy, ef yew so much as lay th' weight of a finger on me I'll hev th' law on ye, shore's yer a foot high! Sheriff! Sheriff Cotter! Here—yew leave me be, gol darn ye! Sheriff! Yew arrest Bill Hardy right now er yew'll never git another drap o' my cider! Leggo me! Halp! Sheriff, I—Halp! Murder!"

Amid the laughter and cheers of the crowd which had gathered around and who knew that Big Bill would not cause the old-timer a particle of pain or injury, the blacksmith reached over and grabbing the General by the collar of his "union-suit" coat and the baggy seat of his homespun breeches, he lifted him out of the sulky and swung him high into the air, while the jug and pie milled in crazy circles about the old fellow's head.

After he had been deposited safely and gently on the ground, the General looked anxiously at his jug and the pie. Assuring himself that they were

uninjured, he strutted up to Genevieve and looked her triumphantly in the eye.

"Ye gol darn critter! Thought ye'd keep me from gittin' t' ground, didn't ye? But ye cain't do it, drat ye! Bill!" he called imperiously to the man upon whom he had but just threatened the full vengeance of the law, "sense yew're so ding-busted keen fer heavy work, s'posen yew tie th' critter to a tree an' gimme a lift through that neck o' th' woods?"

So it was that the General, cradled like a be-whiskered babe in the blacksmith's husky arms, led the gay procession of villagers through the woods.

"Now, folks," said MacQuarrie with a genial smile of welcome, "make yourselves right at home. I know you want to help us all you can by not getting in front of the camera, so I'll ask you not to step inside those two white tape lines that slant out on the ground from each side of the tripod. Those lines mark the limits of the camera's field and anything between them will get in the picture."

"Tim Butterfield, yew see to it thet thet nose of yourn don't git in atween them lines," ordered the General of a lank individual with somewhat more than the usual allotment of olfactory organ. "Won't be room fer nawthin' else in th' picter of thet beak gits in th' way!"

"Aw, shet up!" drawled Butterfield good-naturedly. "Yew wa'n't cheated none when they passed th' noses 'round yerself, old hoss!"

MacQuarrie explained briefly that the first few

times they would go through the action of the scenes would only be practice and that no picture would be taken until they saw the man at the camera turning the crank.

"And," he added with a reassuring smile as he held a black ball up to their view, "when you see the man crawl out of the bushes a little later and throw this bomb, don't be afraid, because it isn't at all dangerous. There's nothing in it but some chemically prepared powder that makes a big flash and a lot of smoke. But it can't do any damage, so just sit right where you are when he throws it."

Had MacQuarrie known the real contents of that ball the smile of assurance would have faded from his face and he would have handled it more respectfully. As it was, he dropped it carelessly into a pocket of his coat and set about instructing the performers in their parts, while the enthralled visitors crowded up behind the camera and watched intently every move that was made.

Down East Quimby's main street Dan Dixon was racing madly for the Manitou Road. It was a hopeless flight and he knew it. But he shut his eyes to its hopelessness and, gritting his teeth, plunged wildly, blindly on over the rough surface of the unkempt thoroughfare, praying in his heart for some sudden twist of events that would change the face of the situation.

It came. As he sped past the Savings Bank, too fast to pick his steps, his toe struck hard against a rocky projection in the road and before he knew

what had happened he tripped and fell flat on his face. And the sharp pain that shot through his right ankle told him that that member was severely sprained.

It was all up now, he told himself as he twisted into a sitting position. The chance had been slight at best. But now—his shoulders shook in a convulsive sob as he thought of the terrible fate that beckoned those at the Falls.

Another instant and he was struggling to his feet, thanking the Almighty with all the fervour of which he was capable for the mishap. For right before his eyes, parked in the little areaway beside the East Quimby Savings Bank, stood Banker Meacham's great, red, high-powered touring-car!

Meacham had not gone to Manitou Falls that day. Such affairs were beneath his dignity. And besides, the thoughts that Hammerson had suggested to him still persisted in his mind and although he was still quite willing to profit from these people, he did not care to sanction their presence so openly as to accept the general invitation.

Secretly, to tell the truth, he had expected that a special invite would be tendered to one of his standing and he felt greatly slighted when it had not been forthcoming.

He was sitting now in his private office in the bank, discussing the subject with Lew Peebles, the inn-keeper.

"Have they paid you for their lodgings, Lew?" he asked.

"Yep. Can't say but what they have, 'Abe. Why?"

"Well, you know what that stranger told me in the store the other day, that that young Dixon scamp should have paid me two hundred dollars for what I did. Probably pocketed the money himself, the young whelp! Like to see him try to get around me again for anything. I just wish he'd try it!"

His wish was to be granted sooner than he thought when he spoke. For hardly were the words out of his mouth when the door burst open and Dan Dixon himself stood framed in the doorway.

His face was white, pain-drawn and streaked with dirt, and his hair seemed to have lost all sense of direction. He wore no coat nor hat and his shirt and trousers were covered with dust from his fall.

"Oh, Mr. Meacham!" he cried excitedly as he limped painfully into the office. "Come—come quick! You must drive me up to Manitou Falls as quick as you can! Please hurry!"

Meacham started at first, at the suddenness of the interruption. But as Dan talked, his lip curled slightly and gave his face a queer look that mixed self-confessed wisdom with satisfaction at the fate-sent opportunity for which he had but just expressed the wish. He opened a drawer of his desk and taking a box of cigars therefrom helped himself to one, and then pushed it over towards Peebles.

"Have one, Lew?" he invited.

"Don't mind if I do, thanks."

Lew Peebles said nothing more. Something told

him that Dan was in earnest. But a few of Meacham's sarcastic references to the part he had played in helping Dan on the other occasion came back to him, and he decided to hold his peace this time.

"Well, Mister Dixon," said Meacham with exaggerated politeness after he had lighted his cigar and was waving out the match, "what's your little game this time? It won't work, whatever it is, and I'll tell you that now. You can't fool me twice, and if you were as bright as I thought, you wouldn't try."

"Oh, I don't know what you're talking about, only come—quick!—I beg—for God's sake!"

"Now don't get all het up, Mister Dixon! You're a pretty good actor, all right, but you did it once too often."

"But I tell you it's a matter of life and death! Please hurry!" begged Dan. "Lots of your townspeople are up there, Mr. Meacham, and they'll be killed if we don't get there before they throw the bomb! Some one changed the flash-powder— Oh, there isn't time to explain—won't you please hurry?"

"No, I won't hurry, and I won't come, either," snapped the banker. "So you can just get out of here with your funny games! Go on, now—run along about your business." So saying, he wheeled around to his desk and presented his back to Dixon.

Dan looked imploringly at Peebles. But the innkeeper only shrugged his shoulders helplessly and looked out of the window. His word at best had

but little weight with the banker and he wasn't going to risk his displeasure now by appearing to endorse this boy's demand a second time.

Dan was in desperate straits. He turned to make one more plea to the banker, but as he did the glint of shining metal caught his eye. Following the gleam he looked down into the open drawer from which Meacham had taken the cigars, and which he had neglected to close. And there, within easy reach of his hand, was a big automatic revolver!

With a cry of savage triumph and forgetful of the excruciating pain he was suffering, Dan pounced on the weapon and leaping to the far corner of the office, covered the banker with its muzzle.

"Now you'll listen to me!" he cried.

Meacham, startled by the new note of command in the boy's voice looked up quickly. When he found himself facing that sullen-looking blued-steel muzzle, a shiver ran down his spine and his face blanched with terror. He had never been called courageous at best.

"Dud—don't shoot, Mr. Dixon!" he chattered weakly, lifting his hands unsteadily above his head in token of surrender. "Sus—save me, Lew—he's gug—going to kuk-kill me!"

"Don't *you* move!" ordered Dan shifting his aim for a moment towards Peebles who was standing with mouth agape by the window.

"Don't you worry!" answered the inn-keeper with alacrity. "I wouldn't move for the whole world and Quimby Centre, jest now!"

Dan's jaw was set determinedly. A pink flush of excitement livened the pallor of his cheeks and as he faced the banker again a peculiar look about his eyes warned that worthy that this was a time for good behaviour.

"Mr. Meacham, you're going to do just as I say for the next half-hour and you're not going to argue about it! Now you get out into that machine of yours as quick as you can get. Come on! You too!" he added as an afterthought as he followed Meacham past Peebles. Peebles nodded agreeably and fell in ahead of Dan, who held back for him to do so.

"Allus glad to 'commodate a friend," he drawled cheerfully, elevating his hands as he seemed to think was expected of him.

As the little procession, Meacham and Peebles with hands in the air and Dan bringing up the rear with the big weapon pointed straight ahead of him, passed by the teller's and cashier's cages, the two clerks gave one look and, with cries of terror flew through the back door of the bank and across the meadows.

Dan made Peebles sit in front beside Meacham, who was at the wheel, while he himself occupied the tonneau.

"Now, Mr. Meacham—give her all the gas she'll take! The sooner we get to Manitou Falls, the sooner your life will be out of danger! Step on her!"

As Meacham, after backing out of the areaway

into the street and heading the car towards the Manitou road went into gear again, he looked ahead along both sides of the street. Luck was with him, for there, loafing about in front of the post-office, was Alec Graham, the deputy sheriff.

As the car picked up, he swerved over until he was almost in line with the officer. And then, as they shot by in a streak of red he leaned far out of the car and screamed:

“Help! Alec!”

Dan jumped to his feet and pressed the muzzle of the revolver against the back of Meacham’s neck.

“Confound your ignorance! If you let another peep out of you, I’ll brain you!”

He fell back weakly into the seat and watched the driver narrowly to see that he tried no other tricks.

As the car turned into the Manitou Trail Alec Graham dashed into the post-office and seized the telephone.

“Cal,” he cried excitedly when he had gotten his connection, “Abe Meacham an’ Lew Peebles jes’ tore up th’ Manitou Trail in Meacham’s auto an’ ther’s a wild-lookin’ feller in the back seat pointin’ a gun at ’em. Abe yelled ‘Help’ when he went by. They oughta be passin’ the crossroads near yore place any minute now. Are yore boys t’ home?”

“Yep—an’ a couple of extry hands, too.”

“Good! Ef yuh can’t git ther in time to stop ’em, chase ’em. I’ll saddle an’ foller right away!”

He slammed the receiver back on the hook and rushed out.

For the most part things at Manitou Falls were progressing nicely. There had been one or two little happenings, though, which under other circumstances would have exasperated MacQuarrie. But as the only damage was the delay they caused and as he now had plenty of time to make the few retakes and film the bomb scene, he let them pass. Ordinarily he was "fit to be tied" when a spectator got in the camera's range, for that meant wasted time and film, and besides, things of this kind are apt to unnerve a highly strung performer. But today he only smiled and took the interruptions in good part.

Once, during a brief intermission, while Charlie Goldberg was getting a focus for a short and rather unimportant retake, an incident occurred that had a rather depressing effect on those present. A loud continuous crashing was heard among the trees as though some wild animal of bulky frame were approaching and a moment later Black Brian stepped into view at the edge of the clearing.

When he saw what seemed to him to be a picnic party of villagers enjoying themselves on his property, he snorted with anger.

"Whut're yuh doin' on my land?" he demanded roughly.

For a moment no one moved or answered. Black Brian's strength and temper were too well known for

the villagers to want to aggravate him. MacQuarrie felt it was his place to answer.

"These people are here as my guests, Mr. Burdette," he said after a moment.

"Yore guests, hūh? Well how about *me*?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I guess you'd better find that out from Mr. Meacham."

MacQuarrie turned his back on the giant and started conversing with the camera-man.

"Meacham, eh? You bet I will! An' right now, too!"

With this the cranky ruffian turned about and for the next few minutes could be heard crashing his way back towards the road. It was some time before the effect of his unceremonious visit was dispelled and for the next half-hour some of the women-folk threw frequent fearful looks over their shoulders in the direction in which he had departed.

Dan's brain was in a turmoil as the powerful motor-car forged its way over the unevennesses of the steeply inclined trail. It had been scarcely ten minutes since he had made the mighty significant discovery back in Joe Morrison's room at the Inn. He tried to shut his mind to the fact that the company had probably been at the location for nearly an hour now and that there were only two or three short retakes to be made before the bomb would be brought into play. Indeed, the impending catastrophe might well take place before it was brought into play at all! For not knowing of its

dangerous content MacQuarrie and the others certainly would not handle it with the extreme care that was due it, and it would not take much of an impact to explode that percussion cap.

Dan groaned and prayed with more anguished fervour than he had ever experienced in his short span of life as he thought of the consequences. MacQuarrie—Hal—Goldberg—Reagan—Contrell, and the others—all good friends of his—blown to pieces. And then, the picnicking villagers—those husky farmers, loyal housewives and ruddy-cheeked children whom he had seen as they started off so gaily a while ago intent on happiness and innocent fun—killed or maimed for life by the unexpected explosion!

“Faster! For God’s sake—faster!” he screamed above the roar of the motor.

Meacham shook his head jerkily and shouted over his shoulder,

“Not up this kind of a grade!”

Then he grinned to himself and nudged Lew Peebles.

For Meacham, in his narrow provincial mind, still believed that Dan was trying to fool him and, with the small man’s antipathy for one who, as he believed, had gotten the better of him once, he had determined to thwart Dan’s present plan, whatever it was. And he had made up his mind to accomplish this end by the simple expedient of running the car into a ditch when they should come to one deep enough.

Peebles had come to the sane conclusion that the wild-eyed youth in the back seat had a very good reason for wanting to reach Manitou Falls in a hurry. And he didn't blame him for the high-handed measures he was taking. Further ideas on the subject he had none. He was merely enjoying the ride as long as he himself didn't seem to be in any danger from that wicked-looking weapon which, as he could see over his shoulder, was trained on the back of Meacham's fat and sun-burned neck.

As they whizzed by the crossroads, where the going was fairly level for a hundred yards in either direction, excited shouts from one branch of the intersecting trail halted their attention, and they caught sight of a half-dozen mounted men galloping towards them. Two of them were armed with double-barrelled shotguns, one had a rifle while each of the others brandished a revolver.

"Hi! Hold up a minute!"

Meacham threw out his clutch with a triumphant chuckle and made a move as if to pull back his emergency brake lever.

"If you do, I'll shoot!" cried Dixon who rightly surmised that this posse was the direct result of Meacham's cry of distress to the deputy sheriff as they were spinning through the village. Meacham ducked his head involuntarily at the threat and released the clutch pedal.

As the car sprang forward again, Dan heard the disappointed cries of the farmers. A sharp, swift whistling over his head followed the report of a

rifle from behind and he quickly stooped out of range. Another crack and a neat round hole appeared in the windshield between Meacham and Peebles.

The thoroughly frightened banker threw a beseeching look over his shoulder.

"Keep going!" Dan ordered. "They've missed twice and we're getting away from them. But remember—I *can't* miss at this range!"

Meacham quaked inwardly and prayed for a ditch.

Dan peeked cautiously over the top of the back and watched anxiously until he saw that they were drawing away from their pursuers. They showed no signs of giving up, however, but were pushing their horses up the grade, which they had now reached, at an unmerciful gait.

It would have been foolhardy for Dixon to have thought of stopping and explaining the gravity of the situation to these well-meaning men. In the first place it would mean the loss of many seconds, a single one of which could not be spared now. In the second place, Meacham, for some reason which he could not fathom, had taken a sudden dislike to him and without doubt would flatly brand as false anything that Dan would say. So the boy grimly decided to fight first and explain afterwards.

A few minutes later, and they had left the posse out of sight in the rear, and Dan continued to urge the banker to push the car to the limit. But they were reaching the steeper grades now, and progress



"Keep going!" Dan ordered



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was slower. Dan was about to make another appeal for speed when, without warning, Meacham spun the wheel around and sent the car into the deep ditch at the side of the road!

The sudden lurch threw Dan to his feet and he glared through bloodshot eyes at the banker, who, now that the deed was done, completely lost his nerve in fear of the possible consequences. For this boy with the automatic looked like a madman.

"I—I couldn't help it, Mr. Dixon," he whimpered timidly. "Honest I couldn't! We must have struck something that turned the wheels. Honest, I didn't do it on purpose!"

Peebles looked scared himself. Any man who would take the chances that this young fellow was taking must be in desperate circumstances. And a blunder like this might well have serious consequences. He hoped Dan was a good shot, anyway.

"Get out, both of you!"

They obeyed with alacrity, and Dixon dropped to the ground at the same time, keeping his companions covered steadily.

"Now, you two get back there and lift for all you're worth!"

Peebles shook his head doubtfully as he took off his coat.

"I'll do my durnedest, Mr. Dixon. But she's a orful heavy brute."

"Oh, you must get it back on the road!" Dan implored. "I tell you it may mean the lives of

every one at the Falls! Now—together—one, two—*Three!*”

But it was of no avail. Again and again they tried, but always with the same result. And now, faintly through the trees could be heard the hoofbeats and cries of the posse, still pursuing and drawing upon them!

“Please try it again, men—all your might, now!”

But again they failed. Meacham, in fact, was not trying. He had heard the sounds of the posse's approach and a crafty look came into his eyes as he bent his back and pretended to lift at the axle. But a moment later he cried out with fear as some big, powerful grip seized him by the collar of his coat, lifted him from his feet, and spun him around. It was Black Brian!

“Hah! And I'm just lookin' fer you, Mr. Meacham!”

Meacham felt that this was certainly his busy day. He didn't like the look in the bearded giant's eye any better than the dangerous glint in Dan's, who was still pointing that automatic at him.

“Whu-what is it, Brian?” he asked fearfully.

“What is it? What d'ye mean by turnin' Manitou Falls inter a picnic ground fer every Tom, Dick, an' Harry in th' township? That warn't in th' terms of the agreement an' I won't stand fer it! I'll hev—”

“Take off your coat, Black Brian!”

The big man stopped at the authoritative tones, turned slowly and blinked with surprise into the

barrel of an automatic revolver which was held very steadily in the hand of a much dishevelled but equally determined young fellow who looked, somehow, familiar to him.

"What do you mean, pointin' that air shootin' iron at me?" he thundered.

"I mean that you're going to take off your coat and help us get this car back on the road *or I'm going to put a bullet in you!*"

Brian stared at him for a moment and then Meacham, anxious to keep the giant's mind off Manitou Falls, whispered:

"Better do it, Brian. He's a wild, raving maniac!"

If there was one thing in the world that Brian Burdette liked, it was to exhibit his superhuman strength and to accomplish feats at which others had failed. He had seen these men straining vainly at the bulky vehicle and even under the present conditions it pleased him to think that he had been called upon as their superior.

He whipped off his coat, and striding up to the big red body, scornfully waved Peebles away as the innkeeper stepped forward to help.

"I'll call for help when I need it," he declared boastfully.

Bending his great broad back he seized the axlebar in his two brawny hands, and, by sheer force of brute strength, lifted the whole rear end of the heavy touring-car three feet off the ground! Pivoting it on the front wheels he swung it up and over

to the centre of the road and then repeated the operation with the front.

"That whar ye want it, son?" he asked Dan proudly as if he would just as soon carry it a few miles further on request.

"Oh, I can't thank you enough, Mr. Burdette! But hurry, men, we haven't much time! And," he added significantly as Meacham stepped on the starter and Black Brian, forgetful of his anger in the glow of this simple triumph, languidly got back into his coat and stood out of the way, "nothing else better happen to this machine until we get to the Falls!"

"There won't!" promised the driver. Then he added as a bullet whistled over his head from the rifle of one of the pursuing farmers who were now in full sight and hot on the trail, "unless their aim improves!"

The sun was at its best by the time MacQuarrie had finished the retakes which he had determined to get out of the way before proceeding with the important scene. He called "Red" Reagan over to him and repeated his instructions of the night before on the proper way of throwing the bomb.

"Hold it like this," he said, taking the black ball from his pocket to illustrate his words. "Draw your arm back—so. And heave it with a long, straight, over-hand swing. Get the idea?"

"I guess so," Reagan answered, taking the thing in his hand and testing its weight.

"All right. Now let's run through the scene once. Positions!"

"Mr. MacQuarrie!"

Louis Contrell approached the director with a worried look on his face.

"Are you sure that flash-powder won't blow up into my eyes?" he asked anxiously.

MacQuarrie laughed a little.

"Well, Louis, I've never yet asked a man to do anything I wouldn't do myself. You brought the can of flash-powder with you, didn't you, Charlie?"

"Yes, sir," responded the camera-man.

"All right. Now, Louis, just to relieve your mind, I'll run through your part once with 'Red' and have him throw the bomb right at me. That'll show you that it can't hurt you when it goes off. Come on, 'Red.' Don't throw it until you see me in the doorway. Charlie, you cue me when 'Red' reaches the spot to throw from."

And MacQuarrie, a careless smile on his lips, stepped inside the cabin while Reagan concealed himself in the bushes outside.

"Ready! Action!" called MacQuarrie, and Reagan crept stealthily out of the bushes, bomb in hand, alert for the cue to throw.

Dan Dixon, panting with exertion and excitement, crashed blindly through the woods that separated Manitou Falls from the road. He tried to call out MacQuarrie's name but his tongue stuck strangely to the roof of his mouth and refused to function. The pain from his injured ankle was intense, and

he wanted to scream every time he set his weight on it. A few paces in the rear Meacham and Peebles struggled through the undergrowth, and further back, on the road-side, sounded the shouts of the posse which had evidently just arrived at the abandoned touring-car.

Dan stumbled once at the edge of the clearing. He struggled to his feet just in time to see "Red" Reagan creeping out of the bushes towards the cabin, with the bomb held ready for action.

He tried again to call out, but again his voice failed him. He waved frantically as he stumbled along, and the General, munching a piece of his cherished pie, waved amiably back at him.

And then the door of the cabin opened and MacQuarrie himself stepped into view, framed in the rough log doorway! Reagan straightened up suddenly and drawing back his arm, poised the bomb for its deadly flight!

"MacQuarrie!" screamed Dan in terror as, forgetful now of injured ankle he fairly flew across the opening and hurled himself straight at Reagan.

The shock of the sudden impact jarred the black ball from Reagan's hand and it dropped straight towards his feet! Without a sound Dan dropped too,—and caught it deftly, an inch from the hard ground!

"Dixon!"

MacQuarrie stepped out of the cabin and came towards him angrily, while Reagan seized

Dan's arm and reached out his hand for the bomb.

"What's the matter with you? Are you crazy?"

"*Look out!*" screamed Dan as he wrenched himself free from Reagan's grasp and hobbled out of reach.

With a long, full swing he flung the engine of destruction from him with all the might his muscular right arm could summon. Then he dropped limply to the ground.

Hal Curtis jumped towards him. But the next instant he was thrown flat on his back.

A dull, deafening roar as of a thousand simultaneous thunder-claps, and the ground shook like an earthquake. Where the bomb struck huge tree trunks were shattered and branches flew through the air. The crash of falling pines and birches mingled with the echoed roar of the explosion as it reverberated back and forth through the hills. Dirt and stones showered over the forest and shot down through the leaves like bullets.

Those who had been standing were knocked from their feet by the shock. The others, too stunned to move, sat where they were, and let themselves be pelted with particles of dirt, pebbles, branches, and turf that showered down on them from out of the clouds. The sun was obscured by the heavy pall of black smoke that hung over all. And, as they slowly recovered their senses, more than one listened expectantly for Gabriel's trumpet. For so quickly had it all happened that most of them did

not associate the recent arrival of this strangely-behaved young fellow with the startling events that had followed.

One of the first to recover from the shock was the General. He looked a bit dazed, and automatically resumed chewing a big mouthful of pie, which operation had been summarily suspended when the explosion had occurred. Then he thought of his jug, and his shrill cries as he hobbled about in search of the cherished container had much to do with bringing his immediate neighbours out of their shock-induced trances. His eye lit on it a dozen yards away and with a gasp of relief he pranced over to the spot.

"Praise th' Lord! Thar's sunshine in my soul!" he chanted in a cracked, high-pitched voice. "Is everybody happy?"

MacQuarrie sat up and looked around at the devastated scene. His eye fell on Dan Dixon and he shuddered as the full comprehension of the situation rushed over him. The others were beginning to stir dazedly as he got up and walked unsteadily over to where Dan was lying close beside Hal Curtis. As he approached them, Hal sat up and looked about him curiously, wonderingly.

"What in the world happened?" he wanted to know when he saw the director by his side.

"I don't know just what the cause was, Hal," MacQuarrie answered gravely. "But somehow that bomb got loaded with something a whole lot stronger than flash-powder and Dan must have

found it out. What a chance he took! We would have been blown into a million bits!"

Curtis caught his breath with a sucking sound as he realized the magnitude of the peril through which they had just passed. Then his eye glowed with affectionate pride at the thought that it was a pal of his who had saved their lives at the imminent risk of his own. He turned solicitously to where Dan lay beside him. MacQuarrie was already bending over him.

"Is he hurt?" Hal asked anxiously.

"Only my ankle. I fell, down in the village, and must have sprained it. It's lucky I did, though, or I'd never have seen the auto."

An expression of joyous relief swept over their faces as Dan answered for himself, and for a moment the director couldn't trust himself to speak. He knelt beside his assistant—here *was* an *assistant*, he thought proudly—and looking him full in the eye, squeezed his hand earnestly as he helped him to a sitting posture.

A canvas of the situation revealed that no one on the location, actor or guest, was injured to any extent. Some of them were considerably shaken by the shock, others suffered a few minor contusions from the falling sticks and stones, and a half-dozen farm-hands, who had been looking on from the bank of the Little Rocky had been knocked over into the stream. But they had chosen a shallow spot by which to sit and they were none the worse for their enforced ablutions.

As these facts came out, the party began to show signs of returning animation. And although the catastrophe which they had so narrowly escaped had something of a solemnizing influence upon them, yet, as they realized that the danger was past, it soon became evident that they were still in the market for a good time.

When MacQuarrie saw that Dan's hurt was but slight, and that no one was injured to any extent, he announced his determination to continue working on the bomb scene. Nothing could be gained, he explained, by delaying until another day and there was no reason why work should not be concluded as planned, and the original idea of returning to New York that afternoon effected.

He enlisted the aid of the farmers in clearing the space between the tape-lines of the débris which had been thrown there by the explosion, while he himself rigged up a makeshift bomb out of a tomato can, which he fitted with a new percussion cap and loaded with part of the extra supply of flash-powder.

To convince Louis Contrell that the flash-powder was safe, he carried out his intention of letting "Red" Reagan throw the bomb at him first. It was comical to see the hasty scramble of the villagers for points of safety as Reagan drew back his arm. But nothing happened except the expected and desired flash and smoke cloud. So the scene was enacted again, this time with Contrell playing his own part and Charlie Goldberg grinding the crank of the camera.

And so it fell out that, shortly after the noonday chimes had been wafted on the pine-scented breeze to the Falls of Mount Manitou, the party of picture-makers and fun-seekers, once more in good spirits, picked their way through the trees back to their heterogeneous assemblage of equippages.

And the long procession, headed pompously by the General, behind the careworn and prosaic "Genevivvy," started down the long trail.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

WESTWARD HO!

A WEEK later, and Dixon felt like a new man. The nervous strain during those eternal minutes that marked the most eventful day of his life had been severe, and both MacQuarrie and Kitson, who had heard the news and had come down to the station to meet them, insisted that he have medical attention.

And now, stretched out on a comfortable chair on the observation platform of the train that was bearing him and the other members of the troupe westward, he laid back his head and closing his eyes, lived the past few days over again in imagination.

Mr. Kitson had bundled him into his car and made him occupy a room in his own suite at the Astor. As an example of the man's thoughtfulness, he had asked Dan, as soon as they had arrived, if there was not some one to whom he would like to send a telegram.

"You see, Dan," he said in a fatherly way, "this news has travelled all over the East already, and many of the papers have put out extra editions on it. That's why all those reporters and press photographers were down at the Grand Central

when your train got in. And if your folks hear of it they may be worried."

Dixon had dictated a message to his Uncle Carter and told him that all was well with him. And, as he found out the next morning, Mr. Kitson had supplemented it with one of his own.

He had slept very late the next morning. And the first voice he heard, from right beside his bed, made him think he was still in the land of dreams.

"Wurra wurra, Danny b'y! An' 'tis a hero ye aire, no less!" declared a hearty brogue that could belong to no one but Mrs. Clancy, his uncle's house-keeper.

A big smack of a kiss full on the lips gave him to know that it was no dream, and opening his eyes he saw the kindly old lady bending over him. And best of all, standing stiff and straight beside her, looking the undeniable pride he felt, was Uncle Carter himself!

The greetings over, Uncle Carter had let him read the telegram which Mr. Kitson had sent along with Dan's.

"We will never be able," it read, "to thank your nephew for his bravery by which he saved many lives at risk of his own. He starts for coast with me in few days. Would like to have you for my guest meanwhile. Will send car for you early in morning. Kirk Kitson."

Mrs. Clancy had insisted upon including herself in the invitation and, once she arrived, took off her

shawl and bonnet and installed herself as Dan's nurse.

Mr. Kitson had come in just then, followed by a waiter who bore a heavily laden tray from which Mrs. Clancy served Dan his breakfast. Dixon noticed that Kitson's lips seemed struggling with a smile, and a moment later, when MacQuarrie entered followed by Charlie Goldberg, he saw the same expression on their faces.

Charlie was carrying a small, flat, round tin box and a big black leather-covered one which, it developed, was a portable projection machine which could be connected to any socket for current.

The smiles broadened as Charlie started making preparations for a "run-off." He erected a small motion-picture screen in one corner of the room and drew the window-shades together until the room was in total darkness.

A white light appeared on the screen, flickered for a moment and was followed by a shadowy blur, which, after Goldberg had corrected the focus, resolved itself, to Dan's great interest, into the Haunted Hut and the little clearing at Manitou Falls.

The next instant found Dixon sitting bolt upright in the bed and rubbing his eyes, while from out of the surrounding darkness came sounds of suppressed enjoyment. For Dan was looking straight at himself! Dishevelled and wild-looking he saw himself emerge from the trees at the edge of the clearing, stumble, recover, leap towards

"Red" Reagan, who had now entered the picture, strike the bomb from "Red's" hand just as Mac-Quarrie appeared framed in the cabin door, and catch it close to the ground.

"Praises be t' th' Saints in Hivven!" ejaculated Mrs. Clancy in pious amazement. "An' is that you, Danny?"

Reagan, in the picture, clutched Dan's arm but Dan broke loose and hurled the bomb away from him. The picture jumped about at this point, and again the white light appeared on the screen.

"That," explained Goldberg as he raised the curtains, "is when the bomb exploded. The shock knocked the camera over—and me with it. And," he added, with a comical grimace as he rubbed a bump on the back of his head, "I didn't feel like taking any more pictures just then!"

Charlie had previously been a camera-man for a news weekly and his "nose for news" itched the instant he had caught sight of Dixon's excited approach through the woods. Almost without thinking, he had trained his camera on him and "caught" his every move.

As Kitson said, the news had travelled fast. The metropolitan dailies had sent representatives to East Quimby and secured the whole story—even to Black Brian's enforced service in lifting Meacham's car out of the ditch at the point of Dan's revolver, which detail was supplied by Lew Peebles—and they featured the story in their morning editions, along with pictures of Dixon which had been snapped as

he disembarked from the train at the Grand Central station.

"I guess, Mac, we've got something else to thank Dan for," Kitson had said as they looked through all the papers. "This is the greatest advertising we could possibly get. I'll wager that, more attention has been attracted to "Flames of Conquest" this morning than was ever attracted to any other picture in the course of production. Can you imagine how much all that front page space would have cost us?"

MacQuarrie shook his head.

"You couldn't buy it for love or money," he answered decidedly, and Kitson agreed with him.

And so it had turned out that what had originally threatened to be a tremendous disaster had been, in fact, a mighty boost for those concerned—with one exception.

That exception was Hammerson, at whose door the whole plot was easily laid. For Dan had told of finding the empty T. N. T. can in Joe Morrison's room and Joe had admitted that he had made the substitution. He explained in a pitiable manner, that Hammerson was going to start a company to star him in pictures, and that they had decided to have a bombing scene in their first picture.

"He told me that the powder in the can was a new kind and he wanted to find out if it was better than the kind in the bomb," the simple-minded fellow declared. "And so he thought it would be a good idea to put it in the bomb without saying any-

thing about it and have it tried out by the company when the scene was being taken."

"You see," Kitson had explained to MacQuarrie after his interview with Joe, "the poor fellow isn't bad—just weak-minded. And that ingrate Hammerson just played on his weakness to make him do whatever he wanted. I'd like to find out where they got that T. N. T., though. It might give a clue to Hammerson's whereabouts."

But Hugh was nowhere about. As soon as he had given his instructions to Joe and had supplied him with the explosive, he had walked to a neighbouring town and taken the next train for New York. And when he had heard of the way in which his plot had miscarried, he held a quick conference in a certain office in the Forties, off Broadway.

He emerged from the interview rather more at ease and, surprising to say, with his capital greatly replenished. For even if he had not succeeded in his work, the published results had satisfied Roger Porter that he was in earnest and that there were no ends to which he would not go to accomplish his purpose of vengeance on the Kitson Pictures Corporation. It was on his advice that Hammerson very conveniently disappeared from New York and its vicinity. He was under instructions when he left Porter's office. But the time was not yet quite ripe for their execution.

Dan was enjoying his trip immensely. Besides himself, Kitson and MacQuarrie, the party contained Charlie Goldberg and Eddie Jordan, whom

Goldberg had definitely attached to himself as assistant camera-man, in which capacity Eddie was rapidly making himself a valuable aid; Hal Curtis; Mrs. Wallaston, a middle-aged "character-woman"; Jack Foley, who played second "heavy," or villain, parts; "Red" Reagan, who played "heavy," and Louis Contrell, who played a juvenile lead. The others who had been in the company had completed all the scenes in which they were to appear and had separated and attached themselves to other producing units. On the coast, so Dan was informed by Hal, they would be joined by a supporting company which was already recruited and working on a few scenes of minor importance in which none of the Easterners were called upon to perform.

The enforced lack of exercise made Dan uneasy for the first day or two of the trip, for he was accustomed to his long walks, and, of late, his boxing-bouts and ball games with Hal and Eddie. But he couldn't have done much of that even if he had not been confined to the train, for his ankle was still quite weak, and he found it necessary even now to use his crutch on the few excursions from car to car upon which he did venture.

But it wasn't long before his uneasiness began to wear off before the novelty of prolonged travel. It was the first time that Dan had experienced the sensation of travelling for days on end, and naturally, many new and interesting things caught his attention.

The sight of the vast, unnumbered miles of wheat-

land caused him to open his eyes in surprise. And when the train would stop for water, or for some other reason at some tiny Western village, Dan keenly enjoyed his brief visits with some of the quaint and unusual characters whom he saw.

Yes, plenty of things kept him entertained for the time being and his comments on what he saw were always refreshing and of interest to Hal and Eddie.

"But what I can't understand," he said one day, when a driving rain was keeping them all inside the car, "is how men who are as busy as Mr. Kitson and Mr. MacQuarrie, and who have so many things to do, can afford to waste so much time on trains. Won't they have to work terribly hard when they get there to catch up with their work?"

Charlie Goldberg, whose seat was opposite Dan's, smiled peculiarly.

"Why do you say that, Dixon? What makes you think they are wasting time?" he asked.

"Well, I don't see, very well, how they can avoid it." Charlie laughed a bit, and Hal, too, smiled.

"Have you ever been back in the 'Bonito'?"

The "Bonito," as Dan knew, was Mr. Kitson's private car which adjoined the forward end of their coach, and in which Mr. Kitson and the director spent practically all of their time.

"Why, of course I've never been in the 'Bonito.' That's Mr. Kitson's private car, isn't it?"

"Yes," interposed Hal. "And not only that,

but it's the travelling headquarters of the Kirk Kitson Pictures Corporation."

"I've got to go in there in a few minutes and run off some stuff for the Chief. Come along with me if you want to, you fellows."

They had just about reached that stage of the trip when anything that promised diversion was welcomed. So when, after a while, the camera-man picked his way up the aisle, he was followed by Dan, Hal, and Eddie.

Dixon was due for a surprise when he entered the "Bonito." His ideas of a private car were not very clear, but they had to do with comfortable chairs and foot-rests, to a great extent. But the first compartment that he saw was quite different from his expectations. For, with one incongruous exception, he found himself in a well-appointed and adequately furnished business office. Along one side of the car were placed three stenographer's desks at one of which a young man was busy type-writing from a notebook of shorthand notes. Along the opposite side was Mr. Kitson's large flat-topped desk, and a small rolltop affair before which Mac-Quarrie was sitting. Everything was complete—even to the water-cooler in the corner.

The incongruous article of furniture was a barber's chair which at the present moment was situated by Mr. Kitson's desk, near a window. And when Dan entered the office, he stared first and then broke into a broad smile of delight at the novelty of the sight he saw.

Bending over Mr. Kitson, who was stretched out at full length in the barber's chair, was a white-coated individual whom Dan recognized from his stay at the Astor as Mr. Kitson's valet, and who was now busily engaged in lathering his master's face for a shave. At one side of the chair sat Mr. Kitson's ever-present secretary reading aloud from a manuscript on his knee. On the other side was an alert stenographer to whom the film magnate dictated, through the foaming lather, changes in the scenario as it was being read to him, and as suggestions for improvements and necessary corrections popped into his ever-active brain.

From time to time he called to the other stenographer and dictated telegrams to be sent at the next station, covering a wide range of subjects, from the stock market to a company making two-reel comedies at one of his Florida studios.

And all the time the deft valet manipulated his skilful blade and exercised the other achievements of the tonsorial art.

MacQuarrie sat at his desk and ploughed energetically through apparent reams of correspondence, and he too spent much of his time dictating to a third stenographer who sat at his elbow.

When Mr. Kitson had finished his work on the scenario his secretary read him a number of letters and telegrams which had been received at the last station at which the train had stopped. As he listened he dictated brief, snappy replies into a dicta-

phone, and these were, in turn, typewritten to be mailed at the next train-stop.

Dan thrilled at this scene of time-economy. Here were people, he saw, who recognized time as their most valuable asset, and who were using every instant at their disposal to the utmost of its utility. Every one was doing something. And everything they did was something that counted. He took in a deep breath, and longed for the day when he could take an important part in some such active scene.

These were the type of men who accomplished the *big* things of life. And they did it, he shrewdly observed, by giving strict attention to the little things. A big thing, he had already found out, was nothing else but a lot of little things well done and properly assembled. He could not but marvel at the dynamic energy of Kitson, who seemed capable of doing a dozen different things at once.

As the valet lifted the steaming towels from his face, Mr. Kitson raised his head and saw the quartette standing by the door, Goldberg in the foreground patiently awaiting orders.

"Go right into the projection-room and thread up, Charlie," he directed. "I'll be with you in a few minutes."

The camera-man led the way through the office into the next compartment in which, Dan observed, there were no windows. Ventilation was effected by means of two revolving fans in the roof. Goldberg snapped on the lights from a wall-switch and the compartment was flooded with a soft amber

light. The walls and ceiling were painted a flat black, with the exception of the further end, into which a permanent picture screen had been built. A half-dozen comfortable chairs, to one of which was attached a broad, flat arm evidently intended for the support of a notebook, a thick, dark-coloured carpet, and the same portable projection machine which Goldberg had used at the run-off in Dan's room at the Astor and which was now connected to a socket in the rear wall, completed the simple but sufficient furnishings of the little travelling projection-room.

When Goldberg had threaded his machine with the end of the film which was to be exhibited for Mr. Kitson's approval, and when the other three had seated themselves comfortably, he switched off the lights.

Presently the screen shone a vivid white through the darkness and the various disconnected scenes began to appear. One scene, in which action and dramatic tension were present to a marked degree, showed a little tot narrowly escaping injury from a speeding automobile, being pushed to safety in the nick of time by a man in overalls.

"I don't think much of that," remarked Dan candidly as the picture faded from the screen.

"Is that so?" asked Hal in tones of playful sarcasm. "I suppose you could improve it?"

"I don't know about that," said Dixon doubtfully, "but I do know one change I'd have made if I directed that scene."

"Well, let's have it. What's this great idea?"

"It isn't any great idea at all," insisted Dan. "It's only a very small detail. But all the same, it would have made it more natural if that child had some reason for going out into the road like that. If he had been playing on the sidewalk with a rubber ball, for instance, and the ball got away from him, it would be more natural for him to go out after it into the middle of the road, than just happen to wander out there in the path of the automobile for no particular reason at all, as he does now. Don't you think so?"

"I guess you're right, at that," Hal acknowledged. "It does seem sort of forced the way it is, now that I think of it."

A few minutes later they were watching a scene in which an automobile drove up to an out-door gasoline station and, after a little action, drove away again.

"Why!" said Dan in surprise. "Did you see that?"

"Sure," responded Eddie. "Peach of a little car, wasn't it?"

"What's on your mind now, Dan?" inquired Hal interestedly. "Are you going to pick all these pictures to pieces? Heavens, man, you'll be as bad as the Big Chief for criticism before long! What was wrong with that scene, pray tell?"

"What kind of a machine was that, Hal? Did you notice?"

"Certainly. It was one of those new model Dagget electrics."

"That's what it looked like to me, too. And can you tell me what an electric machine wants at a gasoline station?"

"Oil, perhaps," suggested Eddie.

"They don't put oil in with the hose from the gas tank, though, do they?"

"By George, you're right again, Dan!" exclaimed Hal. "That is all wrong!"

There was a moment of silence, during which the screen went black again. Then Kitson's voice spoke out of the darkness behind them.

"Who's down there in front?"

For a moment they were too surprised to answer. So interested had they been between the pictures and the discussions about them that they had not heard the president of the corporation when he entered, followed by MacQuarrie. Dan wondered how much his superiors had heard and began to fear that they had not taken kindly to his criticisms.

"It's I, Mr. Kitson—Dixon, and Mr. Curtis and Jordan."

Silence for a moment, and then—

"Which one of you was doing the criticizing?"

"It was I, sir. I'm sorry, Mr. Kitson, if I've done something I shouldn't."

No answer was forthcoming and a moment later more pictures appeared upon the sheet.

Dan felt strangely uncomfortable for the next few minutes. Mr. Kitson had been mighty good to him, he reflected, and so had Mr. MacQuarrie.

And he hated to think that perhaps he had given offence to either of them. Indeed, there had been no barb in his criticism at all. In one instance he had formed an opinion and stated it quite frankly, and in the other, called attention to a real mistake on the part of the director. But he could not help being a little depressed.

His thoughts had carried his attention completely away from the run-off and he was startled to hear Mr. Kitson's voice again, as another picture faded into the darkness.

"Dixon!"

"Yes, sir?"

"What did you think of that scene?"

"I—to tell you the truth I wasn't paying any attention to it, sir. I was thinking of something else."

Kitson addressed Goldberg.

"Wind back sixty or seventy feet and run it over, Charlie. Catch it this time, Dixon. I want an opinion from you on it."

The scene portrayed the pursuit of a man who had just escaped from the clutches of a burly policeman, and as the chase progressed, many bystanders joined it.

Dan wished that Mr. Kitson hadn't asked his opinion of it, for here was another scene that he didn't like. It seemed strange, and perhaps unfortunate, that of all the footage that had to be run-off these three consecutive scenes should contain elements that disagreed with his sense of propriety.

He wondered if he shouldn't simply tell his inquisitor that it looked all right to him, and let it pass. For perhaps he was being given an easy chance to "cover up" his other criticisms. But he had been asked his opinion, and he determined to give it honestly, whether or no!

As the picture faded out, Goldberg switched on the lights, and Mr. Kitson dropped into the seat behind Dan and leaned forward as he spoke. MacQuarrie came and stood beside him, and seemed as interested as his chief.

"Well?" Mr. Kitson demanded.

Dan turned his chair a little and met his inquiring look.

"The runners were bunched too much in my opinion, Mr. Kitson," he said frankly.

"How do you mean?"

"Well, in a crowd of people running like that there are bound to be some that can't run as fast as the others, and they are usually spread out for some distance behind. The way it is in the picture they are all bunched together like a crowd of trackmen starting a race, all going at the same pace. Don't you think so, sir?"

But Kitson didn't answer. Instead he slapped his knee and looked up at the director.

"By George, Mac, he's hit it! That's just what that bit needs!"

Dan looked at MacQuarrie, a trifle timidly it must be confessed, for this was one of the scenes which his superior had directed. But the director's

eyes held nothing but gratification and approval in them.

"You're right, Mr. Kitson. Much obliged for the suggestion, Dan."

Mr. Kitson pushed an electric wall button and his secretary entered.

"Joe, send a wire to Dave Bartlett. Tell him to dig up the principals in scene—" he referred to a paper in his hand—"scene three sixty-eight in 'Flames of Conquest' and retake it, being particularly careful to spread his runners out more—have some of them lag behind, you know. Get that off at the next stop."

When they had returned to the office compartment of the car Kitson spoke privately to Mac-Quarrie.

"Mac, just how much do you know about that young fellow? What's your opinion of him?"

"I don't know a great deal about him, Mr. Kitson, only that he's a hard worker, knows how to use his head and seems determined to advance himself. I think he's going to do it, too."

"Umm. How's his imagination?"

"Haven't had much chance to find out. But from those criticisms of his, I think it must be pretty lively and accurate, don't you?"

"That's what it looks like. Is his head swelled any over the Manitou Falls affair?"

"Not a whit, as far as I can see. He seems to have forgotten all about it."

"What kind of people does he make companions of?"

"As far as I know he hasn't any but Hal Curtis and that Jordan boy, who, by the way, never amounted to anything until he got going with Dixon."

"How does he use his spare time?" persisted Kitson. He seemed bent on learning all he could about this young fellow who wasn't afraid to speak his mind. "I mean," he added with a smile, "what little spare time he has. I know that any assistant of yours—except a dud like Hammerson, perhaps—has mighty little spare time to brag about."

"You're right," acknowledged MacQuarrie. "But what spare time this Dixon boy has he seems to split between reading books and boxing or playing ball with Curtis and Jordan."

"Books? What kind of books?"

"The right kind—books on camera-work, plot development, direction-technique, and the like of that."

"Did you ever try him out? Ever give him a chance to develop and direct a scene from a scenario?"

"Haven't had a chance yet. He's only been my assistant for a short time, you know—two or three weeks. And besides—he's quite young."

"Young be hanged! If he's got the goods I don't care how young he is. I tell you, Mac, his youth may be an advantage because he hasn't had

time to get his brain all clogged up with a lot of hackneyed ideas. But of course, I don't mean to say that you can take any bright young fellow, hand him a megaphone and make a director out of him. He's got to have it in him—that sense of the dramatic, you know, as well as the ability to project his ideas into other people's brains. And on top of that he must have a certain amount of training. Some people, though, acquire the training unconsciously, by observation. They seem to absorb it from their surroundings."

"And that," interposed MacQuarrie, "is just what this Dixon boy is doing, if you want my opinion."

"He is, eh? Good! Then, I'll tell you what to do. When you get to the Los Angeles studios, start sending him out from time to time to shoot some short exteriors and see how he handles it. But don't let on that we're watching him. He might get too big an opinion of himself. In the meantime see if you can find some way of tipping him off to things without making it too apparent that you're doing it."

As he left the dining-car that evening, MacQuarrie stopped at Dan's place and bending a little, whispered in his ear,

"I want to see you in the 'Bonito' as soon as you've finished eating, Dixon."

And as he passed through the vestibule the suspicion of a smile twinkled in his eye.

Dixon experienced a queer sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach as he entered the office a few

minutes later. MacQuarrie was alone, the rest of the staff having started dinner late, and he glowered at Dan as the latter stepped forward.

"Well, young man, what have you got to say for yourself?" he demanded sternly.

"I—I'm sorry, Mr. MacQuarrie," said Dan, in real distress. "Honestly I am."

"Sorry? For what?"

"Why, for talking that way about those scenes you directed, in the projection-room before dinner."

"And why are you sorry?"

"Because I don't like to have you think that I was trying to make little of your work. It seems too conceited on my part to try to suggest any improvements in anything you've done. But really, I didn't mean it that way at all. I was only thinking of what I saw, and I just spoke right out. Please don't think that I was belittling you, Mr. MacQuarrie."

To Dan's great surprise and infinite relief the director burst into hearty laughter.

"My boy," he said kindly, when he had had his laugh, "if the day ever comes when I can't take honest criticism, that day I will stop directing motion-pictures. For when a director gets to the point where he thinks his work is perfect and beyond improvement, he's on the skids as sure as you're born! Don't think that I never make mistakes. I do—plenty of them. You've seen some of them this afternoon. And if it wasn't for the fact that I court criticism of the right kind while I'm making

a picture I'd never get the final results that I do. You gave me a couple of good suggestions that time this afternoon, and I'm glad to admit it to you. And I don't mind saying, between you and me," he added significantly, "somebody else was interested in finding some one who wasn't afraid to express an idea of his own."

Dan said nothing, for he didn't know what to say. He felt a thrill of pleasure, though, in knowing that instead of giving offence he had rendered a recognizable service.

"How's the ankle getting along?"

"Very well now, thank you, sir. It's getting stronger right along. I think so many days of rest on the train are helping it more than anything else."

"That's good. Glad to hear it." He turned his back and gave his attention to his desk and Dan, taking this as an indication that the interview was at an end, moved towards the door.

"Got anything in particular to do tonight, Dixon?" asked MacQuarrie without looking around.

"Why—no, sir. Only a little reading."

MacQuarrie pushed a blue-covered, much-be-thumbed manuscript towards him.

"Here—sit down over there and read this—if you want to. It will give you some idea of what we're all working on."

Dan's heart beat a trifle faster as his eye caught the title on the blue paper cover. It was the

scenario of "Flames of Conquest," and MacQuarrie was permitting him to read it!

He scarcely lifted his eyes from the manuscript until he had finished. And then, starting at the beginning again, he went through it the second time, jotting down in his notebook frequent expressions and directions which were new to him and which he did not understand.

So engrossed was he that he did not hear the door open. Mr. Kitson entered. He looked at Dixon and then raised his eyebrows inquiringly at MacQuarrie. The director nodded significantly.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OFF TO THE SAN BERNARDINO

THE long cross-country jaunt was over at last, and the Easterners were introduced to the Californian branch of the organization with which they were associated.

The Kirk Kitson West Coast Studios formed a regular little city in itself. There were several great buildings constructed along the same general lines as those of the Fort Lee establishment, and in addition to these, forming a street that bounded the reservation on one side were a number of attractive and homey-looking bungalows, in which some of the more prominent screen artists made their homes the year around. Broad, well-kept lawns, cement walks, and an occasional fountain of water playing amid leafy shade trees gave to the place the appearance of luxurious comfort.

It was evident that the picture-making activities were not confined to the studios, for several broad and well-appointed out-door stages were in evidence about the grounds. And an interesting sight was presented in the casual promenading of the variously costumed performers between stages as they saw opportunity for a moment's diversion from their own work.

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As the little company of travellers drove up to the entrance of the stone building marked "Executive Offices" a clatter of hoofs sounded from behind them and the next instant they were in the centre of a laughing, loud-talking crowd of cowboys, mounted on wiry little bronchos whose foam-flecked sides bore testimony to the fact that the ride had been long and hard.

"Daw-gawn! Ef it ain't th' Big Chief hisself back on th' home ranch!" exclaimed a tall, well set-up rider who sat his prancing spotted pony as though that was the place of all places where he belonged. "Howdy, Mr. Kitson?"

Kitson liked the West and its people. Whenever business called him in that direction he always looked forward to seeing them with pleasure. And of all types of Westerners he preferred the association of these ranchers and their men. He had gathered into the fold of his Western companies the pick of the cattle-country—men who were hard-riding, straight-shooting, and loyal; horses that bucked and pranced as though they enjoyed living. Not that he was under the impression that the cowboy of today is as the cowboy of fiction; he was far too well travelled for that. But he loved the romantic adventure of the early West, and it pleased him to surround himself with men who typified that period of the country's development.

He acknowledged their enthusiastic greetings with a hearty sincerity that manifested the pleasure he felt at being with them again. There followed a

few pointed inquiries on the progress they were making on the scenes in which they were working—more scenes for "Flames of Conquest," much of the action of the production being laid in the cattle-country.

"We've just finished those riding scenes you wanted," reported Mark Henry, who had been directing the cowboys and who had followed them in a touring-car with his camera-man. "And the boys are all set to start on location in the morning."

"Great!" exclaimed MacQuarrie. "I was afraid we might have to wait a day or two, and just now, time is getting to be an important consideration again."

"Where's Grady?" asked Mr. Kitson suddenly.

"Right here, Mr. Kitson," sang out a short, chunky-looking little man whose Van Dyke beard and flowing hair did not seem to harmonize with the easy costume of soft shirt turned in at the neck and baggy grey trousers which draped his slightly bowed legs. Grady, it seemed, had charge of the construction of the elaborate set which was to be destroyed by fire to lend the final spectacular climax to the picture. Mr. Kitson's interest, just at present, was centred on that set. And well it might be, for he had told Grady, the greatest master in his line, to go the limit. And judging from the enormous checks he had already had to sign, Grady was doing it.

"How's the Big Set coming along?" he demanded after shaking hands with the other.

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"Great, chief!" was the enthusiastic response. Grady was happy, for he enjoyed the erection of those massive sets, particularly for a man like Kitson, who allowed him free rein to develop his own ideas to their full realization. "It should be done in three weeks more. When will you be over to take a look?"

"As soon as we have lunch—and let's have that quick!"

After they had eaten he left the others to begin their preparations for the morrow's work and, changing into puttees and riding breeches, mounted a well-groomed saddle horse and started off with Grady.

An hour's ride brought them to the crest of hill from which, as they looked down into the valley beyond, could be seen the half-built set.

Kitson's eyes glowed with a pardonable pride at the scene that stretched out below him. It was something to head an organization which could operate on this scale!

For the valley was covered with what appeared to be the business section of a thriving city, still in the process of construction. Frameworks of lofty skyscrapers were rearing their skeleton heights against the hills that enclosed the valley from the east, and a nearly completed church steeple pointed up on a corner of the principal street. Stores and office buildings presented a solid front along the streets, and their frames were rapidly being covered with large square sections of a light thin wood by

workmen perched on scaffolds. In a great many instances, only the front elevation of the buildings were represented, for this would be all that would appear in the picture. Others, particularly on the corners of streets, were enclosed on two or more sides. And everywhere were carpenters, hammering, sawing, measuring, fitting, and lifting into place the various parts of the mammoth set.

Kitson led a busy life, and always he was the centre of unusual activity; but never did he recall witnessing or participating in a scene one-tenth as busy as that through which he now rode.

"You see," explained Grady as they picked their way through the constantly hustling crowds of workmen, "the framework is nearly all up and a lot of the board covering has been put in place. That part should be done by the middle of next week. Then we'll put one crew on the streets, laying a double car-track along the main street, fitting in some imitation paving I'm having made, erecting electric street-lights, hydrants, telephone poles, and wires, laying sidewalks and all that sort of thing. Another crew will work on the interiors that will show from the street through the glass fronts. There'll be no painting to be done outside because, as you can see, I'm having the sections all painted before they're put in place. Of course, there'll be a million and one things turn up to be done at the last minute, but don't worry. I've never fallen down on a contract yet, and you'll have your city already at the time I told you—a couple

of weeks ahead of time, if the weather breaks our way."

"Will it fire up all right?"

"You'll get a fire from this thing that will make the burning of Rome look like an eight-day match," Grady declared. "Every stick in the set has been chemically treated, and, rain or shine, it will burn like tinder. See those signs?"

Every pillar, post, and wall where a card could be tacked or hung seemed to bear a heavily-printed warning, not only against smoking, but against even the possession of matches.

"What are those tents?" asked Kitson, pointing to rows of white wall-tents that seemed to cover the side of a nearby hill.

"Workmen's camp. I make them put in plenty of overtime, so to be sure they get here early enough I keep them right handy. It costs a lot of money, but—I'm giving you the best that money can buy."

They spent the rest of the afternoon in a thorough inspection of the job. They poked into every nook and corner, and Kitson demanded an explanation of everything. At length he appeared to be satisfied and they started back towards headquarters.

At the top of the hill they stopped and turned for another look. Kitson took in a deep breath, and smiled radiantly.

"Grady, it's great!" he declared. "You've caught my idea exactly and you're carrying it out to the letter. This set is going to make the greatest finish."

any picture ever had. And between you and me, it's going to put the Kitson Pictures Corporation so far ahead of the rest that they won't be able to see our dust. I only hope," he added anxiously, "that nothing happens to it before the right time comes!"

Grady looked curiously at his employer through the corner of his eye. He had never heard him make a remark like that before, and it sounded strange.

Kitson himself couldn't have explained just why he said it. It seemed to come out spontaneously, and he wondered at it himself. But he quickly laughed at the idea and forgot it.

He would not have dismissed it so readily from his mind could he have seen the pair of vengeful eyes that peered out at him through the thick foliage by the roadside. For he would have recognized them as belonging to Hugh Hammerson, and the vivid recollection of that individual's recent activities at East Quimby, New York, would have served to warn him against further machinations of a similar character.

Hammerson had arrived at the coast several days before. He had left New York for Los Angeles immediately after the interview with Porter of the Consolidated following the East Quimby affair, for Porter and Bellamy had determined to use him to the limit. They saw great possibilities for themselves if Kitson should be prevented from delivering his picture to Herrera on release date, and they were not going to overlook anything or

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anybody that might serve to further their unscrupulous ends.

They had instructed Hammerson to get to Los Angeles as quickly as possible—ahead of the Kitson party, anyway, so that he would have an opportunity to pick up any available information before their arrival. After that, of course, it would not do for him to be seen in the neighbourhood of the Kitson plant by any one whom he had known at the Fort Lee studios, for recognition would undoubtedly ruin any chances of executing his plans.

Hammerson hung around the studio grounds for two or three days following his arrival and found that the principal topic of conversation was the "Big Set," as it was referred to, which was being built for "Flames of Conquest." Casual inquiry elicited the information that it was being constructed in a valley several miles to the east of the studios. Grady was pointed out to him by a chance acquaintance as the architect and contractor who had the building of the set in charge, and Hugh followed him the next morning when he saw him leaving the grounds in the direction of the location. Grady was mounted and Hugh was afoot, but he had no difficulty in keeping his man in sight, so straight was the road and so level the country.

Hammerson spent much of his time, day and night, in and around the valley after that, and he soon became thoroughly familiar with the huge set, so that he could find his way about it in the dark, almost. He readily saw that not only did this as-

semblage of buildings represent a tremendous financial investment on Kitson's part, but that it was also intended to be the most important element of the super-production. And he was crafty enough to see that here was Kitson's vulnerable point.

Dan busied himself on the afternoon of their arrival in helping with the preparations that were being made for the trip upon which the company was to start on the following morning.

The location, he was told, was in the San Bernardino Mountains, some thirty or forty miles to the eastward of Los Angeles. Plans had been made for them to camp at the foot of the range on the night of the first day, and the second day was to be devoted to the none too easy task of negotiating a certain rocky trail that would take them, by nightfall, to their destination.

When he saw the extent of the preparations that were being made, Dan concluded that "going on location" meant a good deal more here in the West than it had back East. In Fort Lee, he recalled, it usually called for a little extra work on the part of the restaurant force to put up some sandwiches and coffee for the noonday lunch and the bundling of whatever props were required into an automobile truck and then—an hour's ride, a day's work, and back to the studio. Of course, longer trips were taken on occasion, as was the case in the Manitou Falls location, but then train service and hotel accommodations were provided.

But how different this all was! Sides of beef,

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barrels of flour, bushels of potatoes, and other vegetables, a sack of coffee beans, a box of tea—supplies for a year, it seemed to Dan—were loaded into the mule-teams which, with the prop-cart and chuck-wagon, would form the body of the morrow's procession.

The sun had scarcely lifted itself off the horizon the next morning before the company and their impedimenta, looking like nothing so much as a hardy band of pioneers in the early days of the West, headed out of the studio grounds towards the San Bernardino range.

The procession was in two parts. In the van were the cowboys that Dan had met the day before. They were dressed, each according to his fancy, in leather or sheep's wool chaps, flannel shirts, and more or less gaudily-hued neckerchiefs knotted loosely under their chins, high-heeled boots and high-crowned, broad-brimmed sombreros.

They rode their cow-ponies with the careless, easy grace of the typical range-rider and it would seem, to the casual observer, that they left the matters of pace and direction entirely to their mounts. For a gentle pressure of the knee, a short, sharp whistle or some other signal which the animal had been trained to obey, sufficed to express the rider's will.

These rough and ready Westerners had already made a number of riding scenes for MacQuarrie's picture and were scheduled to play parts of some prominence in the scenes that would be enacted on

the San Bernardino location. Then, in all probability, they would be retained for the mob scenes which were to be photographed in the Big Set.

With the cowboys rode all those who preferred the saddle to the springless trucks, and this embraced all of the men folks and most of the women. Although Dan and Eddie had never done much horseback riding before, they were both eager to learn, and in spite of Hal's good-natured warnings that they'd be so lame from the experience that they would be "wearing their legs in slings for the next week," they elected to ride with the crowd. They had been outfitted with well-fitting riding togs by the kindly wardrobe mistress at the studio, and they felt quite important as they urged the somewhat gentle horses that had been provided for them up among the cowboys at the head of the caravan.

Following them came the mule-drawn teams of supplies, the covered chuck-wagon and the property-cart, driven by men who might have stepped out from between the covers of an early Western romance, so accurately did they represent the typical stage-coach driver of bygone days. Such, in fact, had one or two of them been in their youth, and they felt a certain pleasurable pride in retaining the garb and manners of characters who had played so important a part in the country's early development.

An hour's halt was made at noonday and the entire party was fed from the chuck-wagon by the Mexican cook, whose original cognomen of Pedro Maria Julio Corbantes had been abruptly cut down

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to "Pete" by the bluff and unceremonious cow-punchers. The animals, draft-mules, and saddle-stock alike, were fed and watered at a near-by stream and allowed to browse among the tender shoots of grass in an adjoining meadow under the supervision of one of the cow-hands who had been detailed to that duty, while the rest of the humans took their comfort in the shade of the road-bordering trees.

The journey was resumed at a signal from Mac-Quarrie, and the afternoon was but a repetition of the morning. Finally, as the sun was sending its last long yellow shafts against the foothills of the San Bernardino, the site selected for the night's encampment was reached, and the travellers, eagerly anticipatory in spirit, but physically weary and road-worn, welcomed the end of the long day's ride.

Dan and Eddie dismounted stiffly from their horses, and Hal Curtis smiled to himself at their valiant efforts to conceal the lameness that tortured their bones at every step.

But the cowboys, to whom the trip had been just a part of the day's work, turned to with a will, pitched tents, set up camp-cots and made themselves generally useful in one of their most familiar occupations—preparing for a night in the open.

As soon as the quickly-cooked evening meal was disposed of,—and this didn't consume much time, you may be sure!—all hands turned in for the night.

And Dan and Eddie, in spite of saddle-lameness, needed no one to rock them to sleep.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

PROGRESS

A SWIFT-rushing stream battled its way over the rocky bed that stretched its serpentine length through the bottom of a cañon cleft through high-flung walls of solid rock. Of vegetation there was none—nothing but rocks, rocks, and then more rocks.

But the view was anything but monotonous. The stony formations threw themselves into many grotesque figures and reflected a dazzling variety of colours as they caught the rays of the sun above and the brilliant gleam of the mad torrent below. Such was the location towards which our friends were making their way.

High up on the cañon's western wall a broad ledge presented a favourable camp-site and here, late on the afternoon of the second day, camp of a more permanent nature was pitched.

MacQuarrie, after a brief tour of inspection on which he was accompanied by Dixon and Charlie Goldberg, expressed thorough satisfaction with the location, and straightway went to work on the scenario, indicating on the margin just where each particular scene was to be enacted.

Work began bright and early the next morning

and by the time the light was strong enough for clear photography, three scenes were rehearsed and ready for filming. And so fast and hard did they work during that first day that by sundown Dan had actually exercised the last vestige of saddle-soreness out of his bones.

The director seemed veritably to steam with energy during the next few weeks which were spent in the isolated Cañon Camp and he taxed the strength and endurance of those about him to the utmost.

Two motives animated his extraordinary efforts during these days. First and most important, he wanted to accomplish as much as possible while the weather was favourable. A stormy period would seriously delay things, and the time was approaching when "Flames of Conquest" was scheduled for release to a world which, through the clever work of Kitson's publicity department, was already manifesting an unusually strong interest in the newest child of Douglas O. MacQuarrie's master-brain.

In the second place, MacQuarrie, as was necessary in his vocation, was a good deal of a psychologist. Here at Cañon Camp was very little, if any, opportunity for diverting entertainment. And he was familiar enough with human nature to know that when any number of people are thrown together for a protracted period without diversion, it is inevitable that eventually discontent should be borne in their midst; and from that springs discord, quarrelling and widespread unhappiness among them,

which condition is directly reflected in their work. Consequently he drove his people relentlessly from morning until night, with the satisfactory result that, as soon as work was over each day, they wanted nothing on earth so much as their camp-cots and sleep.

The effect on the company was noticeable. They seemed to catch something of MacQuarrie's spirit, and they obeyed his slightest order with an alacrity and enthusiasm that were unmistakably sincere. The cool fresh mountain air honed their appetites to razor edge, and the physical activity of life in the open acted as a tonic on them—especially the Easterners, some of whom had never known an experience such as they were now enjoying.

The novelty of his new position had ceased to affect Dan Dixon by this time, and he set about, with all his old determination, to make good and to acquit himself of his duties in a worthy manner. And he continued to prove himself a real assistant to MacQuarrie in many ways. In fact the director acknowledged to himself that if it were not for Dan he would never be able to make the progress that he was.

Dan only needed to be told a thing once. He was quick to understand, and had enough initiative and fertility of imagination to develop the hints which were frequently all his director had time to give him in the way of instruction, into concrete and specific achievement.

As time wore on, and as MacQuarrie further rec-

ognized the natural ability of his assistant, he threw more and more responsibility on his young shoulders, in order to have more time and freedom for the development of more important subjects.

He frequently went over scenes from the scenario with Dan in order to get another's angle on some detail of dramatic action, and more than once was the assistant able to make a suggestion worthy of adoption.

The greatest expression of his confidence, so Dan thought, came after they had been at Cañon Camp about two weeks. He called Dan into his big weather-beaten wall-tent early one evening and bade him sit on a camp-stool beside him.

"Dixon," he said, in a matter-of-fact way as he handed Dan several pages of typewritten matter, "I want you to take Duncan, Cass, Henley, and a half a dozen of the cowboys out the first thing in the morning, hunt up a couple of good bits of scenery and take these scenes. Tell Eddie Jordan he's to turn the crank for you."

Dan didn't seem to get the full meaning of the other's words at first. But as their significance dawned on him, his blood leaped in his veins with excitement.

"You—you mean that—that I am to direct them?" he asked eagerly.

"Well, there won't be much direction necessary," replied MacQuarrie. "As you'll see when you read the script the action is all of the simplest kind. But what direction is called for will be up to you."

Better sit down there now, and read it over. You may want to ask some questions about it."

Dan read the manuscript through with the utmost care and then re-read it. As the director said, it called for the simplest kind of action. But Dan did not dwell on that phase of it. He focussed his mind on the fact that here was an opportunity to advance his experience a step further, and a very important step, at that. And he realized that, as trivial as the scenes he was to direct might be in comparison to the rest of the picture, yet they could develop into mighty important factors of success or failure for him in his chosen profession.

He discussed some of the details of background and action with his superior and then withdrew to impart the exciting news to Eddie Jordan. Eddie threw his hat in the air with a whoop that woke up half the camp and nearly stampeded the horses when he heard that he was to act as camera-man for his chum. He had worked hard under Charlie Goldberg of late and was as eager as Dixon for the chance to display his newly developed talents.

"I tell you, Dan," he declared enthusiastically, "you and I will have a company of our own yet! You wait and see if we don't!"

Dan found difficulty in getting to sleep that night. Try as he would to compose himself, his imagination refused to stop working, and every time he closed his eyes he could see Henley, Cass, and Duncan enacting the little scenes through which he would direct them on the morrow.

He arose before dawn, instructed Pete, the mess-cook, to put up a lunch for a dozen hearty appetites and set about calling his people for an early breakfast. Then he returned to the tent which he and Eddie occupied and helped his camera-man get his apparatus ready for the day.

By the time the camp was aroused for breakfast Dixon had his little company all mounted and ready to set out, and as Pete banged a kettle cover and yelled "Come and get it!"—this being his informal way of announcing breakfast—the assistant director, who was, for the time being, to all intents and purposes a real director, gave the command that started them up the narrow pass single file.

Many people would have objected to having one as young as Dan placed in authority over them. But somehow there seemed to be none of this feeling among the members of the little detachment from the larger company. For in the short time they had known him they had come to like and respect young Dixon. There was something straightforward and manly about him that struck a responsive chord within their own hearts. He had always been willing, kind, and courteous, without for a moment being servile. And on those occasions when MacQuarrie had given orders through him, he had repeated them with a quiet dignity and total lack of conceit that marked him as one born to command.

His present companions felt that this expedition was intended by MacQuarrie to be more of a test for Dixon than anything else. And they were quite

right. For not only did the director want to see how his assistant would develop and direct a scene, but he was equally anxious to learn how he would handle himself in a position of authority. Many a good man, he knew, had striven hard to win a position, and when it was won, had lost out—not through inability to handle the job, but through sheer inability to handle himself.

But any fears he may have had for Dixon soon proved to be without foundation. Dan was well aware that the majority of his little company were far better versed and more experienced in picture-making than he, and he did not hesitate to ask for an opinion when he felt the need of it. He gave his orders in a quiet, friendly voice but never in such a way that there would be any doubt that they were orders, and intended to be executed.

"I'm telling you, Mr. MacQuarrie," declared Henley in private conversation with the director after their return to Cañon Camp that night, "that boy has the stuff in him! Not a bit up-stage was he, like we wuz afraid he'd be. And not a quarrel with any one all day. How'd the scenes come out that he made?"

"Charlie is in developing them now. If they're dry enough before sunrise we'll take a look at them."

But they weren't dry in time, and as it was impossible to get a tent dark enough during the daytime to serve as a projection-room, Dan and Eddie were forced to wait until the next night before viewing the fruits of their joint efforts.

They had reason to be well pleased with the results, however, and Mr. MacQuarrie, although he said but little, merely remarking to Dixon that he was satisfied with them, secretly exulted over the screened scenes, as well as over Henley's report of his assistant's behaviour. And, he reflected, if the filmed bits looked good when projected with the light supplied by the storage battery from which they were compelled to draw their current here in the San Bernardino range, how much better would they look when they finally reached the silver-sheets of America's finest theatres! For brief as the scenes were they were remarkable, not so much for the action which they portrayed as for the wonderfully picturesque backgrounds which Dan had given them.

Twice more before departing from the San Bernardino location were Dan and Eddie sent out on similar missions, and each time the scenes to be photographed were just a little longer and more involved and so much more difficult of interpretation. And each time, as he grew in confidence, did Dan surpass his previous achievements.

The morning came at last, after they had lived at Cañon Camp for about six weeks, when MacQuarrie gave the word to break camp and start back for the studios.

As the company rode carefully down the mountain pass that afternoon, MacQuarrie silently studied Dan Dixon and compared him with the boy who had limped painfully beside him from the train to the automobile a month and a half before. His

physical stature showed but little difference. Not quite so heavy, perhaps, for the stay at Cañon Camp had been packed with grilling work. And he sat his horse more easily than he had on the up-trail trip. His colour, too, had turned to the ruddy brown that exposure to the sun and wind paints all out-door folks.

But the greatest change was not physical, but mental. MacQuarrie could tell from the bearing of those square young shoulders and the cool look in that deep blue eye that Dan was coming down from the San Bernardino Range with a poise and power he had not had before—an attitude of fearlessness towards life and work that spoke volumes for what had been developing in the boy's soul during recent weeks. He rejoiced silently as he pondered on the possibilities that lay within Dan's grasp, and knew that Kirk Kitson would one day be able to expand his activities a little further, for he would have in his organization another man capable of handling himself in an executive position.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE "BIG SET"

AT last the Big Set was ready! Grady had done his work thoroughly and well, and now the little valley was completely converted into the huge replica of a great city's commercial and industrial centre.

Lofty-towered skyscrapers, modern office buildings, great department stores and a theatre or two lined the neatly paved streets, through which, on signal, trolley-cars would clang their way through traffic of all descriptions. And at night, facilities were there to illuminate the scene not only by means of the regular street-corner lamps, but with mammoth electric signs advertising nationally-known commodities and announcing the fictitious names of stores over whose broad entrances they were hung, while from the front walls of the theatres flashed forth in great incandescent letters the names of popular actors and actresses of both stage and screen fame.

The illusion was perfect, and Kirk Kitson, who had spent well over two hundred thousand dollars to make it so, was proclaimed to the industry as the leading producer of the day. For already the fame of the Big Set had been spread broadcast through-

out the land, and news syndicates were sending feature-writers and photographers from all points of the compass to tell their readers of its magnitude and perfection.

And now, when it became noised abroad that the set was complete and that rehearsals were about to begin, the valley became a veritable Mecca of sight-seers, correspondents, and actors from all over the country.

Living accommodations in Los Angeles were at a premium, and a steady stream of automobiles, horse-men, busses, and pedestrians plied between the city and the valley.

MacQuarrie had had a casting agency opened right on the grounds to help him engage the thousands of extra people who would be required in the various scenes, and so great was the rush for positions that already the number needed had been enrolled.

These, along with every one else who was to be employed in any capacity whatever in the future work of the company, took up quarters in the tented city on the hillside which the workmen had now deserted and which straightway grew to amazing proportions.

The handling and directing of huge crowds of people was one of MacQuarrie's specialties and he set about training his present augmented company in a truly methodical manner.

He first warned them that time was the all-important consideration, and that any one who

caused the loss of an instant through neglect, inattention or lack of prompt obedience, would be summarily dismissed.

Then he drilled them in a few bugle calls which would in the future be the signals upon which they would act. And remarkable though it may seem, he had that big encampment running on a very creditable basis of semi-military discipline and efficiency within forty-eight hours.

Spectators were compelled to remain within certain roped areas, and on fair days these plots on the hillside looked like great picnic grounds, with thousands of visitors enjoying their basket lunches while they scanned the Big Set eagerly through field glasses.

Kirk Kitson was happy. Never, since the inception of the film drama, had the making of a picture been attended by so much free and genuinely legitimate publicity. He had not counted on this in the beginning and it came as a pleasant surprise. For it would save him many thousands of dollars which he would otherwise have had to spend in exploiting the picture to the public. And as a matter of fact, Kitson was beginning to wonder if he had not already spent more than he could afford on "Flames of Conquest."

The need of so many extra people had solved a serious problem for Hugh Hammerson. He had been wondering all along how he could remain in the immediate vicinity of the set once work was begun by the company. But when he saw the great

numbers being enlisted for the mob-scenes, street-scenes, etc., he decided to take the risk of being recognized and apply for a position with them.

As a matter of fact, the risk was not as great as might at first be imagined. For there were only a small number there who had ever seen him before, and he decided that by mingling with the other extras and keeping in the background when any of his erstwhile acquaintances were around, the chances of recognition would be slight, as, indeed, they were.

Hammerson had not weakened a particle in his purpose. The weeks that he had spent among the workmen while Dixon and MacQuarrie were at Cañon Camp had served only to strengthen his desire for vengeance. For he was smitten with a certain remorse now, and filled with regret at not having a part in the executive activities of this stupendous enterprise. If he were only MacQuarrie's assistant now, how he would swell up and bluster! How he would domineer over these crowds of extras! How he would strut and pose before those throngs of visiting sightseers!

But all these things were beyond his reach now, and he would have to content himself with being a mere extra, employed for mob-scenes and the like. But would he, though? A crafty light shone in his sinister eyes and an evil smile played on his lips as he asked himself that question.

Hammerson was not working blindly. He had formulated a very definite plan, simple in execution

but awful in consequence. And just at present he was marking time until the right moment came.

Dan Dixon was absorbing more enjoyment out of these days than he had ever before imagined possible. True, he had never before worked so hard, even in the San Bernardino, and in this business, enjoyment seemed to go hand in hand with hard work.

It was great—simply great, to be a part of so large an undertaking! And he told himself, not without a certain pride, that his was not an unimportant part, either. For MacQuarrie, who was, of course, in full charge, found so many things to occupy his attention that Dan, as his adjutant, was compelled to represent him in a great many things. He and Tommy Fuller, a fat, sunny-faced ex-navy bugler, were ever at MacQuarrie's side and they were both ever ready to break into action, Tommy to sound "Assembly" or some other call, and Dan to interpret and explain the director's instructions to those for whom they were intended.

The day, when the weather permitted, was started with "Reveille" at six o'clock and a half an hour later, Pete and his greatly augmented staff of cooks and attendants, were ready for mess-call. At seventy-three "Assembly" was sounded, and every one on the location convened on the hillside before the headquarters tent. Instructions were then given the performers and extras for their respective parts in the scenes in which they were to participate during the morning, after which the latter, in charge of

Dixon and accompanied by Tommy, were marched to that part of the set where the first scenes were to be rehearsed.

They were allowed to remain at ease while MacQuarrie rehearsed the principals who were to work with them, and during these periods the strictest silence was required of them.

When the principals were perfect in their parts, MacQuarrie took the extras in hand and whipped them into shape, and then the scene was ready for the camera.

Work progressed in this manner until noon, when "Retreat" was sounded and a half-hour allowed before lunch. At one-thirty rehearsals were under way again and work was pushed until the director got good and ready to stop. Supper was not served until MacQuarrie was satisfied that no further work of a satisfactory kind could be accomplished that day.

After supper various amusements were provided for those who cared to take advantage of them, such as informal dances on the green, short ball-games, auto-rides, etc. But as a rule the majority of the extras were quite willing to turn in as soon as darkness fell, in order to be well rested for the early reveille that would summon them to another arduous day.

These were active days for Charlie Goldberg too, for upon him rested the responsibility for all the camera-work that was being done, and there was plenty of it.

Six camera-men were used in addition to himself

and Eddie Jordan, who was now quite an adept at the crank, and each scene was photographed from many different angles. One of the photographers was stationed on a staging high up on the side of one of the more substantial structures to catch altitude views of the scenes, and another,—a big, imperturbable Swede by the name of Swanson—took his place on top of a high frame tower which was built in the middle of the Main Street for the same purpose. These two camera-men, it is of interest to note, had served during the war as photographers for the department of aeronautics, and they volunteered to take even the fire scenes from their lofty stagings, provided the wind would be right for a safe parachute descent before the flames would reach them.

It was one evening several days before the set was to be fired that, as he watched Swanson making some minor repairs on his parachute, an idea occurred to Dixon, and so attractive did it appear to him, he straightway sought out MacQuarrie.

"Why wouldn't it be a good idea," he asked, "to send a camera-man up in an airplane to shoot bird's-eye views of the biggest mob scenes, and especially of the fire?"

"Great, Dixon!" declared the director, quick to see the possibilities opened by the suggestion. And by noon the next day he had arranged for the services of a speedy biplane which would carry a camera-man in the observer's seat.

That same evening a messenger from Kitson's

studio headquarters brought word that Mr. Kitson requested the immediate presence of Mr. MacQuarrie at the studio. That there might be no delay the corporation head had sent his own car with the messenger.

"Better come along, Dixon," said the director. "I've got some stuff to go over with you tonight and it may be late when I get back. We can cover some of the things on the road."

Mr. Kitson seemed disturbed in mind when they were admitted to his presence. He waved them into seats and addressed the director abruptly.

"Mac, are you perfectly satisfied with the way everything is going?"

"Quite!" responded MacQuarrie without hesitation. He knew how the other felt. The time was nearly at hand when the Big Set was to be demolished by fire, and if the work on the scenes which were to be taken while it burned was not done perfectly the first time, there would be no chance of a retake. This, in substance, was the gist of what the producer had to say.

"How much more have you got to do before the fire?" he demanded.

"Why—" MacQuarrie considered for a moment. "I haven't looked at today's output yet, of course, but I see no reason why that shouldn't be O.K. And if it is, I can take everything else in three or four days' time. I guess you can stop worrying, Mr. Kitson. I checked up this noon, and as far as I can see we're three days ahead of schedule now."

We've been particularly fortunate in having a run of good weather, you know."

Kitson looked a little relieved, but still a worried wrinkle persisted just over one eye.

"Well, I'm glad of that, Mac. But you can't blame me for doing a whole lot of thinking and just a little worrying these days, can you? You know what it means if things don't pan out right now. Between the money I've put into the picture and the quarter of a million guarantee I've got up with Herrera, I stand the best chance in the world of going broke if anything misses fire at this stage of the game. Understand, now, I'm not squealing and my feet aren't cold, either. As a matter of fact I've always been a good gambler, and I'll tell you here and now, old man, that if it was six months ago and I had it all to do over again, I'd do it just exactly as I've done it this time, in every detail. And you'd be in charge, just as you are now."

MacQuarrie's eyes glowed with affection and appreciation. Here was a man one loved to give one's best for!

"Mr. Kitson," he said simply, "that's more than I hoped to deserve."

"Well, it's the straight goods. But I can't emphasize too much the importance of seeing that no slips occur between now and the finish. It's entirely up to you, Mac. I won't even be here after tonight. I've got to hop out in the morning for a conference with some big people in 'Frisco, and it may be necessary for me to go from there to Denver

in a week or so. So I won't see you again until it's all done, unless something unexpected turns up. So go to it!"

He turned in his chair and faced Dixon.

"How are things with you, Dixon?" he inquired abruptly.

"Fine, thank you, sir," Dan replied, a little surprised that a man under such a strain should evince interest in his welfare.

"Glad to hear it. Mac has given me pretty fair reports on you. Those little bits you directed up in the San Bernardino weren't bad at all. We're going to use some of them."

"I'm glad to hear it, sir."

The interview ended a few minutes later, and the director and his assistant returned to the valley headquarters.

Work progressed rapidly during the next few days, and at last, after a day and a half had been devoted to screenings and retakes, MacQuarrie made the momentous and anxiously awaited announcement that that afternoon and the whole of the next day would be spent in rehearsing the action which was to be staged during the burning of the Big Set, which, he said, would take place as soon as it was dark enough on the following evening.

Subdued excitement and enthusiasm ran like an undercurrent throughout the whole camp. For it was generally known and appreciated that these scenes would undoubtedly go down in screen history as the most lavish, stupendous, and spectacular

ever filmed. And it would be a mark of distinction, in after years, to have had a part in their making.

To ensure prompt combustion and length and brilliancy of flame-tongue, MacQuarrie had instructed Grady to rush an emergency crew out from Los Angeles to give the set another treatment of the chemical which he had used for the purpose, and this was done during the rehearsals.

The director then assembled the entire company, principals, and extras alike. It had occurred to him that just as Mr. Kitson had deemed it advisable to impress upon him the importance of success on the first attempt in that part of the work which was at hand, so too, it might not be inexpedient to issue a similar warning to those in whose hands lay the possibilities of success or failure.

He outlined the situation briefly to them, expressed his gratitude for the earnestness of their work thus far and his complete confidence in their future efforts.

"And let me warn you once more," he said in conclusion, "about the use of matches during the rest of the period that you will spend here. Every bit of this set has just received a second chemical treatment that makes it very easily combustible and highly inflammable. Consequently, any bit of carelessness with matches might set the whole thing off. And if that were to happen—" He shrugged his shoulders and tossed his hands out in a helpless gesture that said more than words could.

Standing in the rear of the crowd with hat pulled down over his eyes, Hugh Hammerson bit his lips nervously. His hour was approaching, and Fate, it seemed, was playing right into his hands.

That afternoon MacQuarrie, aided by Dan, started rehearsals with the great crowd of extras. He was in a fighting mood now, and he begged, cajoled, scolded, and drove his people to such a high pitch of excitement that, to the thousands of spectators who thronged the surrounding hillsides, pandemonium seemed loose as the seemingly frenzied mobs of humanity surged through the streets of the prop. city in obedience to the bugled signals by means of which the director imparted his will to them.

Goldberg, at a suggestion from MacQuarrie, ordered his corps of camera-men to take their positions so as to get the proper focus and to familiarize themselves with the conditions and angles from which they would have to work during the fire. Even the scaffold and tower photographers, with parachutes strapped to their backs, took their hazardous places, and during a moment's respite, a cheer went up from spectators and actors alike as a soft whirring noise overhead drew their attention to a trim white biplane circling gracefully over the scene, in the cockpit of which could be discerned the figure of Wally Mulligan, one of the most daring of camera-men.

Hour after hour did MacQuarrie drive his people, sometimes with the principals enacting their

rôles in the scenes, sometimes with the mobs alone, until finally, around six o'clock, dripping with perspiration, he signalled Tommy Fuller to sound "Retreat."

The extra people, hot, dirty, and tired, trudged slowly up the eastern hill for the encampment, and the day's work was at an end.

"I don't know what's the matter with those people," complained MacQuarrie as he and his assistant started side by side for his canvas headquarters. "They seem dead—absolutely lifeless. I can't seem to make them *feel* that fire."

"Perhaps," ventured Dan, "they will be all right when the fire is burning."

"Maybe. But I doubt it. Oh, I suppose I've just worked and driven them to death. I'm sorry if I have, for what I did to them today won't be a circumstance to what they've got coming to them tomorrow. And I suppose," he sighed, "that by the time it's dark enough to shoot the fire scenes tomorrow night, they'll be all in. I wish something would happen to wake them up."

MacQuarrie was tired—physically and mentally. The strain and responsibility of the last few months, since he had begun work on the super-feature, had been more than any one knew, with the possible exception of Dan Dixon, whose recent constant and close association with him had given him to know his superior thoroughly. And much as the director loved his work, he was anxious now that it be over, that he might enjoy a well-earned rest. But not for

a second would he think of letting up in any way until the job was done—and done right.

After they had eaten, MacQuarrie and Dan sat at the former's desk and went over the next day's work. The director, whenever he had reached the critical point of a production, always liked to discuss his ideas with another. The verbal expression of his thoughts helped him to criticize and develop them, and it was for the sake of this benefit rather than the desire of suggestion from another, that he now went into such detail with Dan. Dixon had come to understand this trait in his superior's character and listened to him attentively but silently.

It was barely eight o'clock when the unexpected occurred. A messenger from the studios arrived at MacQuarrie's tent and informed him that Mr. Kitson had just called up by long distance telephone from San Francisco and wanted MacQuarrie to make the fastest possible time to that city for an important conference with him.

"He says he won't keep you long, and if you can make that eight-thirty-seven train out of Los Angeles tonight, you can probably get back here by tomorrow night. Mr. Hedstrom has telephoned the Los Angeles station and made reservations on that train for you, and I'll drive you right over as soon as you're ready, if you want to make it, sir."

MacQuarrie took a quick look about the tent.

"I'll have to go as I am, I guess. I haven't a thing but working clothes out here. But if he wants me in such a hurry, he'll have to take me as I am."

Although he could not help experiencing a slight irritation at this interruption of his work, this feeling was not unmingled with relief. For he felt no fears now as far as time was concerned, and this respite would give his people a chance to rest up—and they certainly needed it, he acknowledged. By the time he returned they should be in fine shape for work.

"Dan," he said, as he stepped into the tonneau of the touring-car, "I'm leaving you in charge of everything until I return tomorrow night. If you need me, I'll be at the St. Francis Hotel in 'Frisco. Take care of things, won't you?"

"You bet I will, Mr. MacQuarrie!" he answered with a thrill of pride at the magnitude of the responsibility that was being imposed upon him.

MacQuarrie signalled the driver, who stepped on the starter, and they were off.

As the touring-car turned the first bend in the road it ran full into the glare of headlights approaching from the opposite direction. The driver pulled over to the right and slowed down a bit to pass, but as they came abreast of the other machine it stopped, and an extended hand told them that whoever was riding in it wanted them to stop too.

"Do you know where I can find Mr. Douglas MacQuarrie?" came a voice through the darkness.

"Right here," MacQuarrie answered quickly. "What is it?"

He heard the door of the other car open and

some one stepped to the ground and crossed the intervening space between the two machines. He was able to make out the outlines of a tall, square-shouldered man in a soft hat and light suit.

"Mr. MacQuarrie, my name is Dickinson, I'm on the board of fire commissioners of Los Angeles. Can I talk with you for a few minutes?"

"I'm very sorry, Mr. Dickinson, but if it's anything that can possibly wait, I'll have to ask you to see me some other time. I'm running for an eight-thirty-seven train out of Los Angeles."

"You haven't much time, then, have you? That's unfortunate. But I'll talk fast and stick to facts. You have erected a number of large temporary structures down in the valley, haven't you?"

"Yes," answered MacQuarrie impatiently. He disliked to be rude or to hurt any one's feelings, but he made up his mind that he would give the stranger just five minutes—which was all he could spare, in fact. If he wasn't done at the expiration of that time, he would simply have to leave him standing there in the middle of the road.

"I understand you have had them chemically treated so as to make them very inflammable?"

"Yes."

"And it is your intention, some time in the near future to set fire to the whole assemblage of buildings, is it not?"

"It is,—yes."

"Well, I'm mighty sorry, Mr. MacQuarrie, for I suppose it will mean a considerable loss to those

whom you represent. But I'm afraid we can't let you do it!"

MacQuarrie jumped to his feet as though struck and leaned out of the car.

"What did you say?" he cried.

"Just that,"—and the other stepped back a pace, as though he thought MacQuarrie would strike him— "You can't do it!"

MacQuarrie seldom lost control of himself and it never took him long to recover it. He sat down again and when he spoke, his voice was calm.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Dickinson. I didn't mean to yell at you like that. But your news was quite unexpected. Will you explain yourself, please?"

Dickinson did. It was none of his doing, and he was mighty sorry about it, for it seemed to him to be dead wrong. But a special meeting of the local Fire Underwriters' Association had been called the night before at which resolutions had been drawn up demanding that the fire commissioners forbid the proposed conflagration in the valley to the east of the city on the grounds of inadequate facilities to check any accidental and unintended spread of the flames.

"Spread?" MacQuarrie was incredulous. "What could they spread to? There isn't a house within a mile of here. And I can show you that the building material is so light that even if the wind was blowing a gale, a spark would burn itself out within a hundred yards. Don't you suppose we took

that fact into consideration when it was being built?"

But the other only shrugged his shoulders.

"I'm sorry," he said. "But there's nothing I can do. Confidentially, the president of the Fire Underwriters' Association is chairman of the board of fire commissioners—that's the story in a nutshell. The duty of breaking the news to you was most unwelcome to me, for I am heartily in sympathy with you. But I was compelled to do it. And it is my further duty to warn you that very severe measures will be taken if you fail to comply with the orders of the commissioners. Have I your assurance that you will give us no trouble in this connection?"

MacQuarrie saw the futility of argument, so he merely answered, "I will take the matter up with my principal, Mr. Kitson, and communicate with you on my return from San Francisco."

The world was a blank to MacQuarrie as the car sped on through the night. The tireless efforts of months—the achievement of a life's ambition—Kitson's hundreds of thousands—all—all wiped out by the uncalled-for and totally unfair meddling of a bunch of pettifogging officials.

He slumped down in his seat and his shoulders shook in a convulsive sob.

So this was the end?

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FACING THE CRISIS

HUGH HAMMERSON lay flat on the ground close to the rear wall of the big tent which MacQuarrie had been using as his headquarters. He had been lying there ever since darkness closed in, and he dared not move until Dan Dixon's heavy breathing told him that the tent's only occupant was sound asleep. Then, like a snake, he crawled through the grass on his stomach for twenty or thirty yards, and, straightening up, ran like a deer until he was out of sight.

This was the night, and he exulted to think that circumstances had so shaped themselves by the unexpected absence of MacQuarrie that the vengeful deed which he was about to perpetrate would strike with more force now than would otherwise have been possible. It would, he figured, be a great reflection upon the director for leaving his employer's interests so improperly guarded. And it would, in all probability, be the finish of Dixon's career in the film industry when it became known that the thing had taken place while he was in charge. As far as Kitson himself was concerned—well, he reflected with the malicious satisfaction of anticipated revenge, he would be much better off in

a few minutes' time if he had treated a certain misunderstood and much-abused young man with more consideration and respect that day in the Fort Lee studio.

With such thoughts coursing through his excited brain, Hammerson made his way with care and stealth down the back slope of the hill where the camp was located, circled around and climbed the grade that led to the valley from the opposite direction. Then, crouching and dodging from shadow to shadow, he slunk down towards the Big Set.

After MacQuarrie's departure, Dan, accompanied by Hal Curtis, made a tour of inspection through the Big Set with the aid of an electric flashlight.

"I sure would hate to see anything go wrong while I'm in charge, Hal. It would make Mr. MacQuarrie think that I wasn't on the job if anything happened, wouldn't it?"

"Don't you worry, old boy. Nothing is going to happen. But," he acknowledged, "you *are* a pretty young fellow to have so much responsibility put on you all of a sudden. You're the logical candidate, though, being MacQuarrie's assistant."

"Isn't it wonderful, Hal? Just think of it—only a few months ago I was a utility boy around the studio. Mr. MacQuarrie certainly was good to give me that opportunity, wasn't he?"

"As I remember it," laughed Hal, "you took the opportunity away from him. But you sure have come along, Dan, and I'm proud of you. It's funny

to think that, for the time being, you're my superior officer, isn't it?"

"Well," said Dan modestly, "if Mr. MacQuarrie had had time, he would undoubtedly have put some one else in charge—you, or Charlie Goldberg, for instance."

"Not me!" Hal answered hastily. "I wouldn't accept the responsibility. I'm not built that way."

And so, talking on a multitude of subjects, they completed their inspection and, returning to camp, prepared to turn in for the night.

Dan and Eddie Jordan usually shared the same tent right next to MacQuarrie's big one, and Tommy Fuller occupied a smaller one on the other side of the director's. This night, however, Dan decided that he had better sleep in the director's quarters in order to safeguard the latter's manuscripts, notebooks, and the like.

"Tommy," he said as the happy-go-lucky bugler reported for orders, "don't sound reveille tomorrow morning until eight o'clock. And run over to the cook-tent now like a good fellow, and tell Pete to serve breakfast at eight-thirty."

"Ay, ay, sir!" grinned the fat youth as he clicked his heels together and jerked his hand up and down in a regulation salute. "Anything else before 'Taps,' skipper?"

"Yes—'Tattoo,'" replied Dan quickly.

"Wow! That's putting it over pretty speedy, old man!" laughed the bugler appreciatively. "I

guess I'll lay off you while you're Officer of the Deck!"

Dan stood for a moment with hand resting against the tent-pole as he took one more survey of the valley. Then, with an irrepressible yawn, he flung the flaps far back over the canvas roof—for the night was warm—and entered the tent. To undress was the work of a minute and, after kneeling a while in devout prayer, he turned in.

"Tattoo" sounded from Tommy's clear-toned bugle and, a little later, the sad, sweet song of "Táps" re-echoed through the hills. The encampment folded itself in the darkness and slept the sleep of the weary.

A fitful moon peeped cautiously from behind gathering clouds, and sullen rumblings sounded off to the southward. A cool breeze, sweeping over the hills, herded the clouds together until they obscured the moon entirely and darkened the path of a frightened figure that hastened away from the valley.

Dan Dixon tossed restlessly on his cot. He wished they would put out that light, whoever had it. It was shining right in his eyes, and no matter how he turned he couldn't—

"FIRE!"

He sat bolt upright and opened his eyes. A bright red glow illumined the inside of the tent. Excited voices and rustlings reached him from outside.

Startled, he jumped to his feet, rushed to the door and looked down into the valley.

The Big Set was a seething furnace of flames! MacQuarrie—he must be told. Where was he? He heard a voice—it sounded like Charlie Goldberg's, he thought,—cry out,

“Get Dixon—he's in charge!”

And then rushed quickly upon him the full realization of the crisis that was at hand. MacQuarrie was away, and it was up to him—him alone—to handle the situation!

He dashed back into the tent, tore his way into trousers and sweater and fairly flew out through the door. Goldberg bumped into him just outside, and close behind him crowded Jordan and Curtis.

“Good Heavens, Dan! Do you see that?” shrieked Eddie as he pointed down into the sea of fire.

Dan said nothing for a moment until he had taken one quick but comprehensive glance at the sight that met his eyes.

The fire had evidently just started but already, owing to the chemical which had been applied to the building materials it had gained prodigious headway, until now there was scarcely a structure in the set that was not being licked by long, forked tongues of red and yellow. No sound but a fierce crackling and sullen roar arose from the scene.

Dan thought fast. Here was the time of all times in his career when action was necessary, and his brain leaped on from conclusion to conclusion just as the flames below him, borne on the wind,

leaped from building to building. To attempt to extinguish the conflagration was out of the question—he knew that instantly. But unless the impossible were accomplished—he went white at the thought of the consequences.

Suddenly his heart gave a great leap as a startling thought was borne within him. Momentarily dazed at the magnitude of the undertaking it suggested he closed his eyes and brushed an uncertain hand across his brow.

And then his brain cleared, and his course was marked plain before him.

“Where’s Fuller?”

“Here I am, Dan. Gee! ‘Ain’t it awful! What’ll Mac—”

“Cut it! Bugler, sound ‘Assembly’—on the ‘double!’”

Tommy stopped and gaped at him. Was Dixon going out of his head? But a certain look in Dan’s eye put a stop to speculation, and the fat fellow dove back into his tent for his bugle. Ten seconds later the staccato summons fluttered out above the crackle and roar of the fire.

The whole hillside, dotted with tents, was lit up now and there could be seen the thousands of extra people, clad with whatever had come first to hand, running hither and thither excitedly between the white canvas walls which reflected the pink glow of the flames. At the sound of the bugle they stopped in their tracks and listened. Could it be possible? What in the world did he want *them* for? But

another lively blast followed the first, and the training which MacQuarrie had instilled into them began to have its effect. A few started, and the others quickly followed, until, within a minute, the whole army of them, true to habit, came running earnestly for the assembling point.

Dan turned to Goldberg and snapped his words out briskly.

"Charlie, are all the camera magazines loaded?"

It was Goldberg's turn to stare now, and he did—until he too saw that light in the other's eyes.

"Why—yes. Why?"

"Instruct your camera-men to break out their cameras, take their positions and get ready for action! Quick!"

Goldberg gasped with surprise and then, as he caught the significance of the order and saw Dan's plan, he seized his hand and cried:

"That's the stuff, old boy! Go to it! We're all behind you!"

As he disappeared from view, Dan faced the excited throng of extras and principals who were now crowding around and waiting for him to speak. He signalled the bugler to sound "Attention" and jumped on the raised platform from which MacQuarrie was accustomed to address them. Not a sound could be heard but the ominous roar and crackle of the ravaging holocaust below.

Dan's voice was sharp and clear and, strange to say, free from excitement. He spoke briskly and plunged at once to the point.

"Folks, the set has caught fire accidentally and the director is away. There is only one thing to do, and I'm going to do it with as many of you as have nerve enough to follow me. How many are with me?"

Silence for a moment. Then a voice piped:

"What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to finish making 'Flames of Conquest!'"

Seconds elapsed before the full meaning of his words sunk into the consciousness of his hearers. And then a mighty roar of approval lifted itself into the night and reverberated through the hills until the sound of the fire was lost in the wild tumult of cheers. Dan's face beamed with joy and thanksgiving. He lifted his hand and silence fell.

"I knew you'd be with me! Now listen!"

Hardly pausing for breath, he gave them their instructions. They had rehearsed all the scenes at least once, and since, as in all mob scenes, the action was necessarily simple, they had a good idea of what was expected of them. And fortunately, the costumes of the scene were those of a populace just aroused from sleep by an alarm of fire, so they were all dressed for work!

As he spoke he saw Goldberg and Jordan, followed closely by the other six camera-men, dashing down the hill with cameras and tripods to take up their positions. And from the little plateau above and behind him came the indistinct purr of the motor, and a moment later the white figure of the biplane

soared gracefully over his head and circled high over the valley.

He finished speaking, and, with another mighty shout, the mob, now thoroughly aroused to the possibilities of the situation and their own part therein, charged down the slope into the valley. The excitement seemed to have cast some potent spell over them and, all forgetful of danger, they rushed along to do the bidding of this stripling whom Chance had placed over them. MacQuarrie's prayer had been answered—something had happened to wake them up!

The flames, carried on the breeze from the point of origin, were attacking first the higher points of the structures, from which they were working their way down towards the ground level, and, although danger was there in plenty, it would yet be some minutes before the heat on the streets would be too great to bear, and passage between the buildings would be impossible.

Dan cut a fantastic figure as he jumped up on a platform near the centre of the set, from which to direct the scenes. His long brown hair, tossed in the freshening breeze, surmounted a face which, tanned by the Western sun, now shone bright red in the glare of the flames which threw his sturdy youthful features into strong relief. Clad only in an old blue sweater and soiled khaki trousers, bare of head and foot, he faced the crisis.

Before him lay the famous Big Set, now the embodiment of Life, as, illuminated by the flames

of its own premature destruction, it filled with the excited hordes of actors.

"Position!"

Tommy Fuller, close by Dan's side, blew a blast on his shining bugle and the principals, stirred to action, jumped to their places before and among the extras.

"Ready!"

"Ta-ta!" sounded the bugle, and every actor poised expectantly for the next command. The steady purr of the biplane could be heard distinctly from above.

"Action!"

"Ta! Ta-ta!"

"Camera!"

"Ta! Ta! Ta-ta!"

Dixon's brain reeled as the scene was begun. A wonderful thought flashed through his mind. He—alone and unaided—was directing the most hazardous and spectacular scenes ever staged for a motion-picture drama!

On Dan's right near the edge of the platform, Charlie Goldberg, eyes shining with excitement but chin fixed in grim determination, ground his crank steadily. Just below, on the pavement, Eddie stood back of another tripod, and four other cameras caught each detail of the scene from nearby points of vantage. High on their stagings, risking life and limb, and nearer to the hungry red tongues than any of the others, stood Swanson and Garvey, the two ex-army men, shooting the thrilling action from above as calmly as though they were taking snap-

shots of Grant's Tomb. And on the street below them, bathed in that ever-brightening red glow, surged, pushed, and fought that seething mass of humanity, soundless save for their laboured breathing and the dull impact of body against body as, rushing about blindly, one crashed against another.

And above the dull roar of the leaping flames boomed the megaphoned voice of Dan Dixon, directing!

"Mob—forward! Discover Grey! Anger—hate! . . . Jump for him! Fear, Grey! Dodge! Chase, Mob! Catch him, Sweeney! Close in quick! Hal—speed! Hands up!—Mob—halt! Speak, Hal! . . . Now, Mob—Yell! Shake fists! Grab Curtis! Rush him! Faster! Faster! Great—Cut! Next street now,—on the double!"

Around the corner into the next street, and—

"Positions! Ready! Action! Camera!"

And once more the bugled notes stirred the daring to action.

So on Dan drove his big company into street after street, filming scene after scene, sometimes shooting short strips of just two or three characters, but more frequently using the entire company. Many of the extras were ready to drop from exhaustion and the heat which was now beginning to make itself felt to an unpleasant degree. But the intense excitement and the speed at which they were kept moving rallied them until the last mob scene was done, and but one more bit, in which four of the principals appeared, remained to be taken.

The extras, dismissed, ran until they were out of the danger zone and then, with hardly an exception, flopped to the ground—exhausted.

Dan, panting with exertion, wet through with perspiration and bleeding from a cut in the cheek which a falling spar had inflicted, hoarsely ordered those who were to work in the remaining scene into the main street, and led the way unsteadily himself.

The all-consuming flames had crept nearly to the ground now, and the heat and the glare were unbearable. On all sides the frail-built walls were crashing in and showers of sparks sailed high into the air. The tall frame tower, stretching forty-odd feet up in the middle of the street, alone remained untouched, and high up in this "camera-man's crow's-nest" stood Swanson, the big Swede photographer, with parachute strapped to his back. Swanson, while waiting for the signal to begin grinding, calmly rolled and lit a cigarette, and called happily down to Goldberg, who was setting up his tripod at the foot of the tower:

"Ay guess Ay bane fust faller smoke in Big Set! Hey, Chollie?"

Dan called up to him.

"Better come down, Swanson! That wall on your left, with the electric sign, will fall in another minute!"

"Yust lemme shoot dis bit. Den Ay comes. Hey?"

But Dixon could not afford to wait for an answer,

and seeing that Goldberg was ready, immediately called for action and camera.

Scarcely a minute was consumed in enacting the scene, and Dan had no sooner cried "Cut!" than the wall of which he had just spoken crashed down across the street and lay burning against the foot of the tower.

Calling to the others to follow, he turned and fled through an intersecting lane, and singed with the flames, doubled back and out of the nearly demolished Big Set to safety.

Back on the hillside, safe from the fire's hazard, he turned for a last look at the scene of the disaster—and of his triumph! Yes, he had snatched victory from defeat, had turned disaster into success. And, if the films developed as they should, he had saved the day for MacQuarrie and the Kitson Corporation.

"Look quick, Dan! Isn't that Swanson?"

Eddie Jordan was standing beside him and pointing a trembling finger back into the valley. Dan looked and uttered a cry of horror as he saw the courageous Swede, still at the top of the tower, the whole lower half of which had caught fire and was blazing high above the ruins with which the valley was now strewn. Before he could obey Dan's order after the last scene had been finished, another wall had fallen just in front of the tower, and there he stood, outlined in red against the black hills, cut off from all escape!

"Good Heavens!"

"And we can't do a thing for him! Poor fellow!"

Eddie's voice broke with a sob and he turned away, sick in the anticipation of the other's end. The others had seen the imperilled camera-man by this time, and they stood, silent and horrified, as they watched for the tower to fall and carry Swanson to his death in the fiery sea below.

All but Dan. One look, and, exhausted as he was, he turned and ran up the side of the hill to the plateau from which the biplane had hopped off. It had made its landing as soon as he had finished the last scene, and now Driscoll, the pilot, was preparing to clean his engine after the flight. Dan staggered to his side and seized his arm.

"Wait!" he gasped. "Look!"

The startled aviator followed the direction of Dan's extended finger and an ejaculation of horror burst from his lips.

"Can't we—"

"You bet we can!" he cried. "Jump in the cockpit—we'll get to him some way!" And Driscoll swung himself back in the seat which he had hardly left.

As Dan climbed over the side an automobile sped suddenly into view across the plateau from the top of the hill road and came to an abrupt stop beside the air-boat.

"Which one of you is Dixon?" a harsh voice demanded.

"I am. What is it?"

"Huh! So you're Dixon, eh?" The propeller was spinning and Driscoll impatiently awaited the word to take off. "Well, I'm from the fire commissioners' office. They tell me down there in the camp that you're in charge now. An' if y'are, yer under arrest!"

"I'll see you when I get back!" cried Dan. "Give 'er the gun, Driscoll!"

The engine roared, and the biplane swept gracefully off the edge of the plateau into space, leaving a pop-eyed officer staring after in amazement.

A lusty cheer arose from the crowd on the hillside as they caught sight of the flying craft and realized the significance of Dan's move.

The flames were lapping the top platform of the tower now, and Swanson's predicament became graver momentarily. Dan had no idea what means to use to effect a rescue. His one thought had been that the biplane would take them nearer to the endangered man than would otherwise be possible. But now, as they circled about over Swanson's head, Driscoll, without looking back, passed a coil of stout line over his shoulder.

Dan made one end of the line fast to a cleat on the floor of the cockpit and bent a noose in the other. As they swooped down into the hot glow, he flung the noose straight at Swanson and—missed widely!

Driscoll threw a glance over his shoulder, shouted something unintelligible and, circling about, swooped again.

The first time Swanson had been 'unprepared. He had not expected the rope. But now he was ready for it, and as it whizzed towards him he made one flying leap from the edge of the platform and dove through the air right into the narrowing loop—his camera hugged tightly to his bosom! Another instant and the tower collapsed in a heap of burning ruins!

Bedlam broke loose on the hillside when Swanson was seen dangling in midair just below the biplane, safe from the scorching tongues. Men shouted and cheered. Women laughed and wept. And all hands, led by the supremely happy Jordan and Curtis, joined in a wild, impromptu snake dance that blackened the hill with its sinuous length.

Dan pulled and strained at the rope until, inch by inch, the husky Swede's tow-head lifted itself above the edge of the cockpit. Dan took a couple of hitches around the cleat and, reaching over the side, relieved the photographer of the camera to which he had clung desperately throughout, and the precious film record which it held. His hands free, it took Swanson but a few seconds to lift his bulk into the narrow cockpit, and as he squeezed down beside his saviour he groped in the dark for his hand.

"Ay tank you! You goot faller, oll right!" he bellowed.

They were swinging about over the plateau landing-field now, and Dixon, looking down, saw the strange automobile clearly outlined against the yellow sand, still waiting for him to descend.

He had forgotten its presence in the excitement of the rescue, and now he wondered why the stranger wanted him. He had said something about an arrest, he recalled, and had mentioned the fire commissioners. That must be it! There must be some misunderstanding about the fire. He would straighten that all out for the commissioners, he told himself confidently.

But a second thought then occurred to him, and leaning forward he shouted something in Driscoll's ear. When he had done, the pilot nodded his head vigorously and started to descend.

Driscoll effected a landing at the farther edge of the field, and jumping quickly to the ground, disappeared down a narrow pathway towards the encampment just below.

Seeing him safely out of sight, Dan hastened over to meet the unknown visitor who had started to approach as soon as the biplane landed. There were two other men in the car, Dan noticed now, and they too stepped to the ground and followed the spokesman.

"Well, gentlemen, I am at your service now. What can I do for you?"

"Say, that was a purty nervy thing you just pulled off, young feller. But I suppose there was some trick to that, too. You movin'-pitcher folks can't do anything on th' level, can yuh?"

Dan stepped up to him and looked him straight in the eye.

"Just what do you mean?" he demanded.

"Aw, you know well enough what I mean. Thought you'd slip one over by settin' the fire as soon as Dickinson got out of the way, didn't yuh? Well, yuh can't get away with it. See?"

"Dickinson?" asked Dan curiously, "who might he be?"

"Can th' chin-music! You can ask them fool questions in court—if th' judge'll let yuh. Yer under arrest. Are yuh comin' peaceful, er 've we gotta drag yuh?"

Dan looked at him for a moment before answering, and then glanced over his shoulder.

Driscoll was back in the pilot's seat of the biplane and Charlie Goldberg occupied the cockpit behind him. The propeller was spinning rapidly again, and as he saw Dan turn his face towards him, Driscoll waved reassuringly.

Dan yawned and turned back to the officer.

"Don't bother dragging. I'm too tired to resist. I don't know what I'm arrested for, and I feel too happy to care much. Just pick me out a cell with a nice, soft cot in it, and don't hold the hearing too early in the morning."

He walked unsteadily over to the machine and, swaying just a little, stepped into the tonneau. He dropped wearily into the cushioned seat and promptly fell asleep.

"Too happy, huh?" said the officer. "Happy 'cuz yuh think yer gettin' away with it, huh? Well, y' ain't goin' to! I got orders to confiscate every

foot of fillum that was taken of that fire from start to finish! Now how happy are yuh?"

But Dan, if he heard, was evidently not interested enough to answer.

"Wake him up, Steve, an' find out where them fillums is."

The rough shaking partially restored Dan to his senses, and, from thousands of miles away, it seemed, some tiger voice demanded:

"Where's them fillums?"

He tried to open his eyes to see what the owner of such a voice could look like. But they were cemented together, so he merely asked indifferently:

"Wha' fi'ns?"

"You know mighty well what fillums! I want the fillums that you had taken of this fire tonight. Quit yer stallin', now! Where are they?"

Dan smiled sleepily as he lifted a heavy hand and pointed vaguely in the general direction of the North Pole.

"Safe—on way—'Frisco," he murmured drowsily as he turned his back on his inquisitor and promptly went back to sleep.

Puzzled, the representatives of law and order peered over to the north. They could see nothing.

But borne back on the wings of the wind could still be heard the steady purr of the biplane.

"Shucks!" snorted the officer disgustedly. "The air-ship!"

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE GUEST OF HONOUR

THE next night Dan Dixon, neatly dressed in a well-cut blue serge business suit, crossed the spacious lobby of the St. Francis Hotel in San Francisco and approached the desk.

"I would like to see Mr. Kitson. He's registered here, I believe."

The clerk eyed him impersonally.

"Mr. Kirk Kitson? He's engaged just now, and doesn't wish to be disturbed."

"Just a minute, please!" insisted Dan as the clerk turned away from him. "I have an engagement with Mr. Kitson. Kindly tell him that Dixon is here—Dan Dixon."

The clerk looked sharply at him.

"Are *you* Mr. Dixon?"

"That's my name, yes."

The clerk's attitude underwent a complete change from cold commercial courtesy to admiring affability.

"Why—er—pardon me, Mr. Dixon, but I expected to see a much older man. You see," he smiled, "we've heard all about you. That was a wonderful thing you did last night! Mr. Kitson's expecting you. He left word to have you come

right up. Front! Show Mr. Dixon to Mr. Kitson's suite!"

As he followed the uniformed bellboy to the elevator Dan was uncomfortably conscious that he was being closely scrutinized by many of the lobby-loungers in the vicinity of the desk. They had read of his spectacular achievement of the night before and were quick to recognize him as the clerk pronounced his name. He was glad when the door of the elevator hid him from the battery of their eyes. As the car bore him up to the floor upon which Mr. Kitson's suite was located, Dixon could not help wondering a little just why his employer had sent for him. He supposed that he wanted to know all the details of the night before. But then, there was nothing that he could not have learned from Goldberg or Driscoll when they had delivered the films to him.

After leaving the scene of the fire, Dan had spent the night before in jail and had been given a hearing in the morning on the charge of setting fire to the set after having received explicit orders from the fire commissioners not to do so. Dan denied all knowledge of the commissioners' orders and declared that he had had nothing to do with setting the fire, but the court had considered the fact that he had used the fire to good advantage as an indication that he had been responsible for its start and, after setting the date for his trial a week later, fixed his bail at five thousand dollars.

He had telephoned the studio and explained his

predicament to Hedstrom, the director-in-chief of Mr. Kitson's West Coast Enterprises, who drove down and arranged bail for him without delay.

As soon as they were outside the courthouse, Hedstrom told Dan that Kitson had telephoned from San Francisco the first thing that morning and left orders for Dixon to report to him at once at the St. Francis Hotel and to advise him by telegraph what time he would arrive.

There was just time for Hedstrom to drive Dan out to the studio to dress for the trip—for he was still hatless, coatless, and shoeless, attired only in khaki pants and sweater—and back to the one o'clock train. Hedstrom himself had sent the telegram requested by his chief.

The trip, although pleasant, had been uneventful, but now Dan's heart fluttered with excitement as he knocked at the door which the bellboy indicated as the entrance to Mr. Kitson's suite.

"Come in!"

Dan recognized MacQuarrie's voice and he opened the door. But he stopped short on the threshold and stared at the scene that confronted him.

Folding doors between two luxuriously furnished rooms had been thrown wide open to make one long apartment, through the middle of which ran a long, linen-covered table, set with sparkling cut-glass, gleaming silver and tall vases of brilliant-hued cut-flowers. Over the centre of the table was suspended by invisible wires a great floral horseshoe, in the

curve of which were imbedded the letters to form the name "DAN DIXON!"

Around the table, as though awaiting the appearance of the guest of honour were some two dozen men. Of them Dan recognized Mr. Kitson, Mac-Quarrie, Charlie Goldberg, and Driscoll, the aviator. Happy smiles adorned the faces of all, and an enthusiastic cheer, punctuated with riotous applause, broke loose as he stood framed in the doorway and looked wonderingly at them.

An unaccustomed choking tightened his throat, and a heavy, unaccountable mist blurred the scene for a moment. But in another instant he found himself buried in Kirk Kitson's arms.

"Dan! Dan, my boy, you don't know what you've done!" declared the president of the Kitson Pictures Corporation as he ushered him to his place at the table and wiped a suspicious moisture from his own eyes.

Never had there been a banquet like that one! And seldom had such an assemblage of motion-picture notables gathered to do honour to a member of a rival organization. Men whose names Dan had been accustomed to see blazoned forth from the pages of trade-papers since early in the summer wrung him by the hand, slapped him on the back and hailed him as a hero. There was T. V. Billington, of Cameracraft Films, Inc.; Harley Harris, who controlled the destinies of the United States Photoplay Company; Cameron Sissle, director-in-chief of Cameron Comedies; Wallace and

Donald Estabrook of the Estabrook Feature Corporation, and a half dozen other similar celebrities. Charles Goodhue, the famous dramatic star was there, too, as well as Billy Finnegan, at whose funny antics Dan had laughed in the little Gem Theatre of his native town in New Jersey, Dunbar Livingstone, Conrad Fitzgerald, and more, whose faces at that moment were gracing twenty-four sheets stands all over the country. These, with a sprinkling of newspaper men, made up the gathering, and exerted themselves to the utmost to honour this boy, who had done what few men could have done.

During the course of the sumptuous banquet which was served, glowing speeches of praise and tribute were made by the guests until Dan, covered with blushes, wanted to run and hide some place to conceal his confusion.

After the others had spoken and while the coffee was being served, Mr. Kitson arose to his feet, and silence born of interest in what he had to say fell upon the gathering.

"Gentlemen," he began, "you and I deal in fiction. It is our business to place before the eyes of the theatre-going public the product of some scenarioist's imagination. But a certain branch of my producing organization has been through adventures during the past few months which, if put upon the screen, would be scoffed at as improbable. All that you know about it is that last night, during a director's absence, a premature fire occurred and

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that the assistant director, with great initiative and presence of mind, stepped into the breach and saved the situation. But I'm going to tell you now of a few of the circumstances surrounding the fire that you don't know, and which will convince you that I have much more reason than you at first imagined to be grateful to this boy."

And then he narrated with simple eloquence the story of the making of "Flames of Conquest," from the near-tragic events at Manitou Falls right up to his own departure from Los Angeles a few days previous. As he talked, interest grew among his auditors until one would have thought they were listening to some great tragedian interpreting the crucial scene of a drama.

"You can now imagine my feelings," Mr. Kitson went on, "when, last night, Mr. MacQuarrie arrived and told me that the Los Angeles Fire Commissioners had issued very positive orders that under no circumstances were we to use the Big Set for the purpose for which we had built it! The only course open was to fight them in the courts, and that would have set the release date back so far that my guarantee with Herrera would have been forfeited, to say nothing of the cancellation of many contracts with the big first-run theatres of the country.

"I had just resigned myself to this thought when Hedstrom, my Los Angeles man, wired me that the Big Set was in flames! Gentlemen," he declared huskily, "I never in my life came so near to throwing up the sponge. I was licked—licked good and

proper. And MacQuarrie and I just sat and stared stupidly at each other for two hours, with hardly a word. And then," his eye sparkled at the recollection, "just before daybreak, some one banged on that door and in staggered Charlie Goldberg and Ted Driscoll, with the completed scenes of the picture! Men, if you don't believe me, ask Mac, but when they told me the story of what Dixon had done, I just broke down and cried like a kid. And if you want to know how well he did it, just watch what I'm going to show you."

He made a motion with his hand and the lights went out. And then, to the accompaniment of a subdued clicking, every scene that Dan had directed during the night before was projected on the portable screen that always accompanied Kitson on his travels.

The last scene to be run off came as a complete surprise to the guest of honour. For it was one in which, instead of directing, he had played an important rôle. It showed with remarkable clearness, considering the distance from the camera and the light conditions under which it had been taken, the thrilling rescue of Swanson from the flaming tower by Dan in the cockpit of the biplane.

As the picture faded from the screen and the lights flashed up, the crowd around the table nearly lifted the ceiling from the walls with a mighty cheer, and jumping to their feet they fought for the chance of shaking the hero's hand. Some one called for a speech, and, in spite of his remonstrances, Dan was

lifted bodily to the top of the table. His face was red with embarrassment, and he looked like a big schoolboy about to start an imperfectly memorized recitation.

"G-g-gentlemen," he stammered, "I—I don't know what to say—honest I don't. You're certainly mighty nice people to—to do all this. But I can't see why you should. Because—honest—I did less than any one else. All I did was tell the others, and they did everything. To tell the truth, I didn't know what else to do. I was all excited and everything when I saw the fire, and I just couldn't stand there and watch it. I felt it was my place to do something and I tried to think what Mr. MacQuarrie would do if he was there. And you know all *I've* ever seen Mr. MacQuarrie do, is *work* and make everybody around him work." A howl of laughter greeted the naïve tribute to the director's executive ability, and the director joined in heartily. "And so," Dan concluded modestly, "I just put everybody to work. And they sure worked great!"

It was a wonderful night, and Dan's head was in a whirl. Indeed, that it didn't swell to undue proportions with the hearty and sincere praise that was bestowed upon him was a tribute to his natural modesty and level-headedness.

The next day Dan returned to Los Angeles. Mr. Kitson had invited him to spend a few days in San Francisco, but Dan reminded him of the trial in which he was to be the defendant a week later, and the former, agreeing that it would be a good idea

to get to work digging up evidence, arranged over the telephone with one of the ablest attorneys on the coast to handle the case.

"I don't care much whether they decide that you're guilty or not, Dan," Mr. Kitson said happily as he drove Dixon to his train. "We all know that you're not, and the way you turned the accident to my advantage is worth more dollars than they would ever dare fine you. So don't worry."

But as it turned out, it was not necessary to pay any fine, nor was there a trial even. For a most surprising and very interesting piece of news greeted Dixon on his arrival at the studio. Hugh Ham-merson was under arrest for arson!

It seemed that one Dunleavy, who had been employed as an extra in the Big Set, had been Ham-merson's tent-mate. He had found Hugh anything but companionable and, being of a social turn him-self, had resented the other's assumed superiority. Several remarks that the big fellow had dropped had aroused his suspicions, and noticing that he was extremely nervous just before the fire took place that night, he had determined to follow him. He had watched him eavesdropping behind Mac-Quarrie's tent, had trailed him over the circuitous route around the hills, and, before he realized what Hugh was up to, had seen him apply the match that did the damage and pick up his heels in flight.

Dunleavy had given chase but had lost him in the darkness. Returning to the scene of the con-flagration he saw that all hands were too busy to

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start searching for the culprit, so he had made his way to police headquarters in Los Angeles and furnished the authorities with a full description of the guilty man.

Hammerson was apprehended in the act of boarding a south-bound train the next day shortly after Dan's departure for San Francisco and, faced with the truth, broke down and confessed. Deciding, no doubt, that the only hope for clemency lay in his making a clean breast of everything, he told the details of the Manitou Falls affair and succeeded in involving Messrs. Bellamy and Porter of the Consolidated as accessories before the fact in their action of furnishing him with funds and securing the explosive for him.

The notoriety stirred up by his revelations soon forced Bellamy and Porter out of the film business, for no honest concern cared to be associated with them in any way whatever.

Mr. Kitson, after reading the confession, had a talk with Hammerson and, concluding that he had learned his lesson, and in consideration of his own friendship for Hugh's father, interceded for him and succeeded in getting him off with a suspended sentence.

One memorable morning the staff of the Kitson studio convened in the palatial projection-room which adjoined the executive offices to witness the first run-off of a completed print of "Flames of Conquest," which had been assembled and titled—which operation indicates the work of painting and photo-

graphing all the reading matter which appears in a photo-play—and was all ready for release.

Kitson, MacQuarrie, Goldberg, Jordan, Driscoll, Swanson, and all the rest of Dan's friends were there, and all were in fine humour, joking and laughing with one another while the operator was threading his machines.

The talking stopped with the extinguishing of the lights, and the atmosphere was tense with anticipation. A long pencil of light shot from the booth to the screen and traced the words:

KIRK KITSON PICTURES CORPORATION

presents

“FLAMES OF CONQUEST”

Adapted from the novel

by

G. BEECHER KANE

The words survived for a few moments and then abruptly changed to a new set which, when Dan read them, caused him to open his eyes wide.

Directed jointly

by

DOUGLAS O. MACQUARRIE

and

DANIEL DIXON

A hearty round of applause greeted this announcement, for it meant that Dan was to receive full credit

as a director for the work he had done. Wherever the picture would be shown, his name would be flashed to the millions equally prominent with that of his chief, MacQuarrie.

"That was mighty good of you, Mr. Kitson," Dan said earnestly after the run-off was finished. "And I certainly appreciate it. But honestly, I don't deserve that. It seems hardly fair to Mr. MacQuarrie, you know."

"Is that so?" smiled Kitson. "Well, then, you'll be interested to know that it's Mac's idea. In fact he wouldn't listen to having it otherwise. And I think he's right," he added. "Only for you, you know, there wouldn't be any picture!"

Dan turned to the director and tried to thank him, but MacQuarrie wouldn't hear of it.

"It's mighty small thanks, Dixon, for some of the things you've done. Do you ever stop to think that if it hadn't been for the bravery of a certain young fellow not a thousand miles away, on a certain day at Manitou Falls, the daisies would now be blooming over yours truly? And you're trying to thank me for giving you a little credit that's merited in its own right? Forget it, old man!"

A few minutes later as Dixon was chatting with Eddie Jordan and Hal Curtis, Mr. Kitson's secretary touched him on the shoulder.

"Mr. Kitson would like to see you in his private office, Mr. Dixon."

Dan followed him down the corridor into the president's luxuriously appointed office, and found

Kitson and MacQuarrie deep in earnest conversation. They looked up as he entered, and the former motioned him to a seat.

"Dixon," he said when Dan had seated himself, "Mac and I have been talking about you. We've come to the conclusion that you've got some real good stuff in you and you should have a brilliant future. I'm not afraid to tell you these things, because if you haven't gotten a swelled head over the events of the last week, you never will get one. And that quality of being able to keep your head down to fit your hat is a big asset, too, by the way. Now I want to ask you what your plans are. Have you formed any?"

Dan was a little disconcerted by the abruptness of the question.

"Why," he answered, "of course I have plans for my future. But I don't understand just what you mean."

"Oh, of course I know you have plans for the future. Big ones, too, I'll bet! And we'll discuss those later," he smiled. "But what I mean is, the immediate future—from now on. Do you think you're qualified to step right out now and direct a picture yourself?"

Both Kitson and MacQuarrie listened intently for the answer. It was slow in forthcoming, for Dan took plenty of time to think.

"Mr. Kitson," he said at last, "the only way I would want to do that just now would be in an emergency—like the other night. I don't forget that

most of the credit for the actual direction of those fire scenes really belongs to Mr. MacQuarrie. He had already rehearsed them more or less, you know. And the rehearsals are mighty important. And furthermore, he developed them from the scenario. No, I don't think it would be good judgment for me to direct just yet. I'd much rather wait awhile, until I learn everything that Mr. MacQuarrie can teach me—that is, if you and he are willing."

MacQuarrie was beaming, and Kitson slapped his knee resoundingly as he turned to the director.

"Mac," he declared, "there's no use talking to this fellow. He takes the words right out of your mouth! Listen, Dan, I want to make a proposition to you. Don't worry about salary—that will be fixed up to your satisfaction, all right. But just trust us with the next year of your career, will you?"

"I'd rather do that than anything else you could suggest," answered Dan, his eyes shining happily.

"Good! Then you'll stay on as Mac's assistant for the balance of the season, and learn all you can in the meanwhile. And then, when next season starts, there's going to be a new production company added to the Kitson Corporation. And the director's name will be—Daniel Dixon—Esquire!"

At the conclusion of the interview, Dan Dixon made his way through the corridor and out the main door. He stood on the top step for a moment and surveyed the scene before him—the spacious lawns, the great studio buildings and the out-door stages. Activity was the predominant note—carpenters hammer-

mering and sawing materials for new sets, utility men running hither and thither with props., companies working earnestly on the out-door stages, directors shouting at them through their megaphones and camera-men grinding their cranks.

His eyes lighted up with a joyous enthusiasm, and he took a deep breath.

He was a part of it!

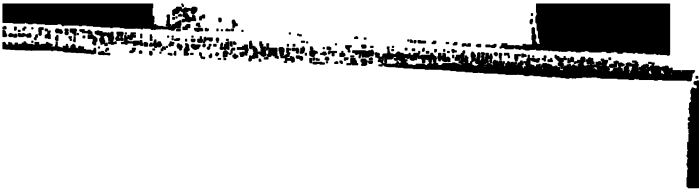
THE END.

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